BELINDA PARIS COACHING

The Executive Career Positioning Guide

How senior professionals can become easier to find, easier to shortlist and harder to ignore in a selective market

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Helping senior leaders secure better roles, promotions and pay rises

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About Me

I work with senior professionals, executives and emerging executives who are ready for better roles, stronger market visibility and clearer career positioning.

Before becoming a career coach, resume writer and LinkedIn strategist, I spent more than 20 years in executive recruitment and senior talent acquisition. I have seen how hiring decisions are made, how shortlists are built, how recruiters search, and why highly capable people are often overlooked.

The issue is rarely capability.

More often, the issue is positioning.

At the senior level, your resume cannot read like a list of duties. Your LinkedIn profile cannot look like an online version of your job description. Your interview answers cannot rely solely on technical skill.

Decision makers need to understand your value quickly.

They need to see the problems you solve, the commercial outcomes you have delivered, the level at which you operate, and why you are the right person for the role they are trying to fill.

That is where my work comes in.

Through Belinda Paris Coaching, I help senior professionals clarify their value, strengthen their resume, improve their LinkedIn presence and build a more strategic approach to the market. My work is practical, honest and grounded in how senior hiring actually works.

I have supported thousands of professionals across Australia, New Zealand and beyond to reposition themselves for better roles, promotions, pay rises and career moves that reflect their true capability.

My background also includes training as a Master NLP Coach and Practitioner, Timeline and Hypnosis Therapist, and Certified Life and Career Coach. That means my approach is not only about documents and job search strategy. It is also about confidence, mindset and helping clients communicate their value without underselling themselves.

This guide has been created to help you think more strategically about your next move.

Not just what role you want.

But how the market sees you, how clearly your value comes through, and whether your resume, LinkedIn profile and career story are strong enough for the level you want next.

If you are ready to stop relying on job boards and start positioning yourself for better opportunities, this guide will show you where to begin.

Opening Positioning

You do not need another generic job search guide.

You need to understand how senior hiring actually works.

At the executive and senior professional level, the best roles are often not won by the person with the longest resume or the most impressive list of responsibilities. They are won by the person whose value is clear, relevant and easy to understand.

This matters even more in the current market.

Employers are more cautious. Hiring decisions are taking longer. Senior roles are being assessed with more scrutiny. Many opportunities are filled through search, referral, networks and direct approach before they ever reach a public job board.

That means your resume, LinkedIn profile and career story need to do more than describe what you have done.

They need to show why you are the right person for the level, the market and the problem the organisation is trying to solve.

This guide has been created for senior professionals who know they have strong experience, but are not getting the traction they expected.

You may be applying for roles and hearing nothing back.

You may be getting approached for the wrong level.

You may be unsure how to explain your value.

You may know you are ready for a bigger role, but your resume and LinkedIn profile aren't making that clear enough.

That is the gap this guide will help you close.

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Introduction

> *If you are a senior professional and the market is not responding, it does not always mean you are underqualified. It may mean your positioning is not strong enough.*

This guide is for senior professionals, executives and emerging executives who want to be more visible, more credible and more commercially compelling in the market.

It is especially relevant if you are:

- Looking for a senior leadership role.
- Preparing for a promotion.
- Moving from technical expert to executive leader.
- Trying to reposition after redundancy, burnout or a career break.
- Returning to the market after several years in one organisation.
- Applying for roles but not getting interviews.
- Getting interviews but not converting them into offers.
- Unsure how to explain your commercial value clearly.
- Wanting to be found by recruiters, headhunters and senior decision makers.

At this level, hard work is not enough.

Experience is not enough.

Being good at your job is not enough.

The market needs to understand what you do, where you fit, what problems you solve and why you are worth serious consideration.

What this guide will help you do

This guide will help you:

- Clarify the next role you are targeting.
- Understand what senior hiring decision makers are really assessing.
- Build a resume that shows commercial value, not just career history.
- Improve your LinkedIn profile to enhance search visibility and credibility.
- Move beyond job boards and build a smarter senior job search strategy.
- Clearly articulate your value in interviews.
- Handle setbacks without assuming the problem is a reflection of your capabilities.
- Assess salary, bonus, flexibility and role risk before accepting an offer.

- Exit well and start your next role with confidence.

The goal is not to make you look busy.

The goal is to make you look relevant.

Core message

It may mean your positioning is not strong enough.

Your resume may be too task-based.

Your LinkedIn profile may not be search-friendly.

Your career story may not show commercial impact.

Your value may be clear to people who already know you, but not clear enough to people assessing you quickly.

That is the problem we are solving.

If you would like help identifying what is missing from your resume, LinkedIn profile or career positioning, you can book a complimentary 30-minute CLARITY Strategy Session, valued at $497.

In this session, we will look at where you are now, what is not working, and what needs to change so you can present yourself at the level you are ready for.

Book your session here:

https://calendly.com/belindapariscoach/clarity-call

If you would like help identifying what is missing from your resume, LinkedIn profile or career positioning, you can book a complimentary 30 minute CLARITY Strategy Session, valued at $497. **Book your session here.**

CHAPTER 1

The Senior Market Has Changed

Experience still matters, but in a selective market, your value needs to be clear before the market can act on it.

CHAPTER 1

The Senior Market Has Changed

The senior job market has changed.

That does not mean good roles have disappeared. It means the way senior professionals are found, assessed, shortlisted and selected has become more demanding. Employers are more cautious, boards are asking sharper questions, and hiring managers want clearer evidence before they make a decision.

At the senior level, organisations are not simply hiring a person to fill a vacancy. They are hiring someone to solve a business problem. That problem might be financial performance, operational complexity, growth, risk, governance, transformation, culture, investor confidence, customer retention, cost control or leadership stability. The role title may be familiar, but the reason behind the hire is usually much more specific.

This is why experience alone is no longer enough.

A strong career history matters, but it does not automatically explain your value. A senior title helps, but it does not always show the size, complexity or impact of your work. A long list of responsibilities may prove that you have been busy, but it does not prove that you have improved anything important.

That distinction matters in the current market.

In Australia, unemployment rose to 4.5% in April 2026, the highest level since November 2021, with employment falling by 18,600 people. Reuters also reported that business and job ad indicators fell in April, pointing to more cautious employer sentiment. (Reuters) Australia is also still dealing with inflationary pressures, with core inflation above the Reserve Bank of Australia's target range in April 2026. (Reuters)

New Zealand is also operating in a tighter economic setting. In May 2026, the Reserve Bank of New Zealand held the official cash rate steady but signalled that future rate rises may come sooner than expected due to inflationary pressures. Reuters also reported that unemployment in New Zealand was expected to peak at 5.4%. (Reuters)

For senior professionals across Australia and New Zealand, this matters because a cautious market behaves differently. Employers do not stop hiring completely. Instead, they take longer. They involve more stakeholders. They compare candidates more closely. They test for risk. They want clearer evidence that the person they are hiring can deliver in the environment they are walking into.

This is where many capable professionals get caught.

They have the experience. They have delivered results. They have led teams, managed change, influenced senior stakeholders and carried significant responsibility. Yet their resume, LinkedIn profile and interview story still do not make the value of that experience clear enough.

At the senior level, unclear positioning costs opportunities.

Why experience does not speak for itself

Many senior professionals assume their experience should speak for itself, particularly when they have spent years building credibility inside complex organisations. It is an understandable assumption. When you have been trusted internally, when people already know your value, and when your reputation has been built over time, you may not need to explain yourself clearly to the external market.

The problem is that the external market does not see your career the way your current or former organisation sees it.

Recruiters, executive search consultants, hiring managers, CEOs and boards are not assessing your full history. They are assessing the evidence in front of them. That evidence may be your resume, your LinkedIn profile, your interview answers, a referral conversation, or a recruiter's summary of your background.

If that evidence is unclear, too task-based or too broad, the market may not see the level you actually operate at.

This is why some senior professionals apply for roles they are capable of doing and hear nothing back. It is not always because they lack the right experience. Sometimes they are being overlooked because the reader cannot quickly see why their experience matters.

A long career does not automatically create a strong market message.

A senior title does not always explain the scale of your leadership.

A stable career does not always show growth, influence or commercial judgement.

A technical background does not always translate into executive credibility.

A list of responsibilities does not prove business impact.

This is the first major mindset shift. Your experience matters, but it still needs to be positioned.

The first screen is fast

Senior hiring can feel slow from the outside, but the first screen often happens quickly.

A recruiter, hiring manager or search consultant may look at your resume or LinkedIn profile and form an early view within seconds. They are not reading every line at the start. They are scanning for relevance.

They want to know whether you fit the level. They want to see whether your background matches the brief. They want to understand your function, sector, leadership scope and business exposure. They are looking for signals that tell them whether you are worth deeper consideration.

If those signals are unclear, you may be passed over before anyone properly understands your capabilities.

That is not ideal, but it is real.

The more senior the role, the more important this becomes. Hiring decisions at this level are rarely made by one person. A recruiter may need to present you to a client. A hiring manager may need to discuss you with the CEO. A CEO may need to explain the shortlist to the board. A board member may need to understand why you are more credible than another candidate.

If your value is difficult to explain, you create friction in the process.

Strong positioning reduces that friction. It makes it easier for the market to understand where you fit, what problems you solve and why you should be considered.

CLIENT EXAMPLE

A senior professional came to me at the end of December after six months of applying for roles and receiving no meaningful traction.

On paper, she was highly capable. She had technical depth, leadership experience and senior stakeholder exposure. She had delivered strong outcomes and had worked hard to stay consistent in her search. She was applying for roles that seemed to match her background, but nothing was moving forward.

The issue was not her capability.

The issue was how her value was being presented.

Her resume explained what she had been responsible for, but it did not make a clear case for the next level she was ready for. It read more like a history of duties than a business case for her value. Her LinkedIn profile was also too passive. It did not make her seniority, leadership scope or market fit clear enough.

We repositioned her around the business problems she solved, the outcomes she had delivered and the level of responsibility she was ready to step into.

By March, she had secured a new role with a base salary $60k above her initial base salary, plus a 30% bonus.

The outcome was not only financial. It gave her family more breathing room. It rebuilt her confidence. It also helped her see that the issue had never been her ability. The market simply had not been seeing her value clearly enough.

That is what strong positioning can change.

The best roles are not always advertised

One of the biggest mistakes senior professionals make is relying too heavily on job boards.

Job boards have a place. Advertised roles can still lead to strong opportunities, and formal applications are sometimes necessary. However, at the senior level, job boards are only one part of the market.

Many strong opportunities are surfaced through executive search, direct approach, referral, board networks, former colleagues, investors, industry contacts and private conversations. Some roles are never advertised publicly. Others are discussed quietly long before a formal process begins.

There are many reasons for this.

A company may be replacing a senior leader and needs discretion. A restructure may not yet be public. A board may want to understand the market before making a decision. A CEO may ask trusted people whom they know. A search consultant may start building a shortlist before an advertisement goes live.

This is why relying only on applications can create a false picture of the market. You may be working hard, applying regularly and doing everything that looks right on the surface, while still missing the opportunities being discussed elsewhere.

This does not mean you should ignore advertised roles. It means you need a broader strategy.

Your resume must be strong enough to support formal applications. Your LinkedIn profile must be clear enough to support a recruiter search. Your network needs to understand what you are looking for. Your career story needs to be easy to repeat. Your value needs to be obvious so someone doesn't have to work hard to find it.

At the senior level, you are not just applying for roles.

You are positioning yourself to be found, referred, remembered and recommended.

Senior hiring is about risk

At junior and mid-level, employers may focus heavily on skills, tasks and experience. At the senior level, they are also assessing risk.

Can this person lead through complexity?

Can they influence senior stakeholders?

Can they make sound decisions under pressure?

Can they manage people, money, change and politics?

Can they protect the business?

Can they improve performance?

Can they represent the organisation well?

Can they be trusted?

These questions sit underneath many senior hiring decisions, even when they are not asked directly.

This is why a senior resume cannot simply list what you were responsible for. Responsibility is not the same as impact.

You may have managed a team, but did the team improve? You may have owned a budget, but did you reduce cost, improve margin or increase control? You may have led change, but what shifted because of your leadership? You may have reported to the board, but what decisions did your insight support? You may have implemented systems, but what business problem did those systems solve?

The market is not just asking what you have done.

It is asking why it mattered.

That is where many resumes fall short. They describe the role, but not the value. They explain the activity, but not the outcome. They mention stakeholders, but not influence. They list projects, but not the commercial reason those projects mattered.

At the senior level, that gap is costly.

Your positioning needs to answer four questions

Strong executive career positioning answers four questions quickly.

What level do you operate at?

What problems do you solve?

What business value do you bring?

Why should someone trust you with a bigger role?

If your resume and LinkedIn profile do not answer those questions, you are making the reader work too hard.

That does not mean your positioning should be inflated or full of empty language. It should not. Senior decision-makers can quickly see through vague claims. Words like "strategic," "results-driven", and "dynamic" do very little unless they are backed by evidence.

Good positioning is specific.

It connects your experience to business outcomes. It shows the level of complexity you have handled. It explains the commercial value of your work. It gives the reader enough context to understand why your background is relevant.

For example, saying you "managed financial reporting" is not enough on its own.

A stronger message would explain the scale, purpose and result of that work. Did you improve reporting quality? Did you give executives better visibility? Did you strengthen controls? Did you support better decisions? Did you reduce reporting time? Did you improve confidence in the numbers?

That is the difference between listing experience and proving value.

The market rewards clarity

In a selective market, clarity matters more than volume.

Sending more applications will not fix weak positioning. Rewriting your resume for every role will not help if the core message is unclear. Being more active on LinkedIn will not help if your profile does not align with the roles you want. Networking will not work if people cannot easily understand what you are looking for.

The answer is not to work harder at a broken strategy.

The answer is to strengthen your positioning.

For some senior professionals, the gap is the resume. It reads like a career history instead of a business case.

For others, the gap is LinkedIn. They are not appearing clearly in recruiter searches, or they are being found for roles that do not match where they want to go next.

For others, the gap is messaging. They undersell, overexplain or speak too technically in interviews.

For some, the gap is focus. They are open to too many things, so they appear unclear rather than flexible.

The stronger your positioning, the easier it is for the market to place you.

This is not about becoming someone you are not. It is about making your actual value easier to understand.

What this means for you

You do not need to be the perfect candidate for every role.

You need to be clearly positioned for the right roles.

That means understanding where you fit, what your next market wants to see and how your experience needs to be framed. It means moving away from a list of tasks and towards a clearer case for your value.

It also means being honest with yourself.

If you are not getting interviews, the issue may not be the market alone. If you are being approached for roles that are too junior, your LinkedIn profile may be sending the wrong signals. If you are getting interviews but not offers, your interview story may not be landing as strongly as it could. If people in your network do not know what you want next, they cannot refer you properly.

These are not personal failures.

There are positioning problems.

And positioning problems can be fixed.

The current market is not asking senior professionals to be louder. It is asking them to be clearer.

Chapter Reflection

Before moving to the next chapter, take a few minutes to assess your own positioning.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Is my current resume showing value, or is it mainly listing experience?
- [ ] Does my LinkedIn profile clearly reflect the level I want next?
- [ ] Would a recruiter know what roles to approach me for?
- [ ] Can I explain my business impact without rambling?
- [ ] Am I relying too heavily on advertised roles?
- [ ] Is my career story clear enough for someone else to repeat?
- [ ] Do my achievements show outcomes, or do they only describe activity?
- [ ] Does my current positioning match the salary, seniority and scope I want next?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, that does not mean you are behind. It means there is work to do.

And that work starts with positioning.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The senior market has changed.

Experience still matters, but it is not enough on its own. The people who gain traction are not always the most qualified. They are often the people whose value is easiest to understand.

Your next role will not come from simply doing more.

It will come from making your value clearer, sharper and more relevant to the market you want to move into.

CHAPTER 2

Why Capable Leaders Get Overlooked

Strong experience can still be missed when your resume, LinkedIn profile and career story do not make your value easy to understand.

CHAPTER 2

Why Capable Leaders Get Overlooked

One of the hardest things about a senior job search is that capability does not always translate into traction.

You can have a strong career, deep experience, loyal referees, good leadership skills and a track record of delivering results, and still not get the response you expected from the market. That can be confronting, especially when you know you are capable of doing the roles you are applying for.

This is where many senior professionals start questioning themselves.

They wonder if they are too old. Too expensive. Too technical. Too broad. Too niche. Too loyal to one organisation. Too senior for some roles and not senior enough for others. They start applying for more roles, repeatedly revise their resumes, or lower their expectations because they assume the problem must be them.

Sometimes the issue is role fit.

Sometimes the market is tight.

Sometimes the competition is strong.

But very often, the problem is much simpler.

The market cannot clearly see the value they bring.

At the senior level, that matters. The hiring process does not reward hidden capability. It rewards clear evidence, relevant positioning and a strong value case.

The market can only assess what it can see

Your current organisation may know your value because people have seen you work over time. They know how you think. They know how you handle pressure. They know how to deal with difficult stakeholders, protect the business, lead through change or keep things moving when the environment is complex.

The external market lacks that context.

Recruiters, search consultants, hiring managers, CEOs and boards are working from what is in front of them. That may be your resume, your LinkedIn profile, a referral note, an interview answer, or a brief summary from someone who has spoken with you.

If that information is unclear, too broad or too focused on tasks, the market may not understand your true level.

This is why being qualified is not the same as being clearly positioned.

A qualified person may have the right background.

A clearly positioned person makes the relevance obvious.

They show the level at which they operate. They explain the types of problems they solve. They give evidence of business value. They make it easy for someone to understand where they fit.

That distinction can decide whether you are shortlisted or skipped.

The real issue is often not the resume format

Many professionals assume their resume problems are formatting issues.

They think it needs to look more modern, be shorter, use better design, or include different wording. Those things can matter, but they are rarely the core issue at the senior level.

The deeper issue is usually positioning.

A senior resume cannot simply document your career. It needs to make a case.

It needs to show why your experience matters now, for the level you want next, in the kind of organisation you are targeting. It needs to connect your responsibilities to business outcomes. It needs to show judgement, influence, scale, commercial value and leadership impact.

A resume that is accurate can still be weak.

A well-formatted resume can still fail.

A resume that lists impressive employers can still leave the reader unsure of your value.

This happens when the resume tells the reader what you were responsible for, but not what changed because of your leadership.

For example, a senior finance professional may write that they were responsible for reporting, budgeting, forecasting, auditing, stakeholder engagement and team leadership. That may all be true, but it does not tell the reader enough.

It does not show the scale of the environment.

It does not show how their work improved decision-making.

It does not show whether they strengthened controls, reduced costs, improved reporting quality, influenced executives or supported business performance.

At the senior level, the reader needs more than a list of functions.

They need to understand the value of those functions.

The danger of sounding too operational

One of the most common problems I see with senior resumes is that they make strong leaders sound too operational.

This usually happens when the resume is written from the inside out.

The person writes down what they do every day, what falls within their remit, which meetings they attend, which processes they manage, and which tasks they oversee. The content is usually true, but it is not always useful.

The result is a resume that sounds busy rather than valuable.

This is a major issue for senior professionals, especially those who have worked their way up through technical, operational or functional leadership roles. They often have genuine depth, but their resumes still read like lists of tasks.

Statements such as "prepared reports," "managed stakeholders," "oversaw processes," "supported projects," or "attended leadership meetings" may describe activities, but they do not demonstrate seniority.

The market wants to know what those activities meant.

What decisions did your reporting support?

What risk did your controls reduce?

What improved because of your leadership?

What commercial issue did you solve?

What did the executive team trust you to manage?

What changed because you were involved?

If the resume does not answer those questions, it may position you below your true level.

> **CLIENT EXAMPLE**
>
> A senior finance leader came to me after being overlooked for roles that should have been within reach.
>
> She had strong experience across financial control, reporting, budgeting, audit, governance and senior stakeholder support. She had worked closely with executives and had been trusted with complex reporting, controls and business-critical decisions.
>
> But her resume did not reflect that level.
>
> It made her look like a reliable finance operator rather than a senior commercial leader.
>
> The content was accurate, but it was not strong enough. It listed monthly reporting, reconciliations, budgeting, year-end processes, audit support and stakeholder engagement. All of that was true, but it buried the parts that mattered most.
>
> It did not show the function's scale.
>
> It did not show how she improved the quality of her reporting.
>
> It did not show how her work supported better executive decisions.
>
> It did not show her influence with senior stakeholders.
>
> It did not position her as someone ready for a larger leadership role.
>
> We rebuilt her positioning around commercial value, governance, decision support, controls, leadership and business performance.
>
> The shift was not about making her sound bigger than she was. It was about making her actual value clearer.
>
> Once her resume and LinkedIn profile reflected the level she was already operating at, she became much easier to assess for senior finance opportunities.
>
> That is what strong positioning does.
>
> It closes the gap between what you have done and what the market can see.

LinkedIn can weaken or strengthen your position

Your LinkedIn profile creates another layer of visibility.

For senior professionals, LinkedIn is not just an online resume. It is a search and credibility asset.

Recruiters and search consultants use LinkedIn to find candidates, assess alignment, compare backgrounds, and determine whether someone looks relevant before making contact. Hiring managers and CEOs often consult LinkedIn before or after reviewing a resume. Your network may also use it to understand what you do and where you are heading.

This means your LinkedIn profile must do more than exist.

It needs to support the roles you want next.

Many senior professionals have LinkedIn profiles that are too thin, too generic or too focused on their current employer. Their headline may simply repeat their current job title. Their About section may be vague or outdated. Their experience section may list employers and dates without showing scope, value or outcomes.

This creates two problems.

First, you may not appear in the right searches.

Second, even if someone finds you, they may not see enough reason to contact you.

This is where a hidden opportunity is lost. You are not always being rejected. Sometimes you are not being found. Other times, you are being found for roles that do not match the level, function or direction you actually want.

That is why LinkedIn needs to be intentional.

Your headline should make your seniority, function and value clearer. Your About section should explain what you do, what problems you solve and what kind of value you bring. Your experience section should show scope, not just job titles. Your keywords should align with the roles and sectors you want to be considered for.

This does not mean stuffing your profile with buzzwords.

It means using the language the market uses when searching for people like you.

Senior positioning must connect the dots

One of the biggest mistakes senior professionals make is assuming the reader will connect the dots.

They often will not.

You may know that leading a finance transformation requires governance, change leadership, executive influence, systems knowledge and commercial judgement. But if your resume only says "led finance transformation," the reader may not understand the full value.

You may know that managing a difficult stakeholder group requires trust, diplomacy, courage and political judgement. But if your LinkedIn profile says "strong stakeholder engagement," it sounds like everyone else.

You may know that reducing reporting time by 40% gave the business faster insight, better control, and stronger decision-making. But if your resume says "improved reporting processes," the impact is diluted.

Your job is to help the reader understand the value of what you have done.

This is not about overexplaining. It is about giving the right context.

A strong senior positioning statement connects four things:

The problem.

The scope.

The action.

The business outcome.

For example, instead of saying:

Managed budgeting and forecasting.

A stronger version might say:

Led budgeting and forecasting across a complex operating environment, improving cost visibility, strengthening executive decision-making and supporting more disciplined business planning.

That sentence gives the reader more to work with. It shows the function and explains why it mattered.

That is the shift.

Your value needs to be easy to repeat

A strong career message should be easy for someone else to repeat.

This matters more than most people realise.

A recruiter may need to present you to a client. A hiring manager may need to explain you to a CEO. A former colleague may want to refer you. A board member may need to describe why you are worth meeting.

If your value is unclear, they may not know what to say.

That creates friction.

The clearer your positioning is, the easier it is for other people to advocate for you.

For example:

She is a senior finance leader who improves reporting quality, financial control and executive decision support in complex organisations.

He is a transformation leader who brings structure, governance and delivery discipline to major change programs.

She is a commercial operations leader who improves performance, accountability and customer outcomes across large teams.

He is a senior technology leader who connects systems, data, risk and business strategy in regulated environments.

These are not slogans.

They are clear market signals.

They help people understand where you fit and why you matter.

Why senior professionals undersell themselves

Many senior professionals are not comfortable talking about their own value.

They do not want to sound arrogant. They do not want to claim credit for team outcomes. They do not want to oversell their achievements. They may have spent years inside organisations where doing the work mattered more than talking about it.

That mindset is understandable, but it can work against you in the external market.

Clarity is not arrogance.

Evidence is not ego.

Commercial value is not bragging.

You are not making things up. You are helping the market understand the impact of work you have already done.

This is especially important for people who have been loyal to one organisation for a long time. Internally, your reputation may have done some of the work for you. People knew your history. They knew your credibility. They knew what you could be trusted with.

Externally, that history has to be explained.

If you do not explain it clearly, the market may underestimate you.

And if another candidate explains their value better, they may progress even if they are not more capable.

What makes positioning strong

Strong positioning is not about using inflated language.

It is about being clear, specific and commercially relevant.

It should show:

The level you operate at.

The size and complexity of your work.

The problems you solve.

The people you influence.

The decisions you support.

The risks you manage.

The outcomes you deliver.

The type of role you are ready for next.

This is why generic phrases do not help much on their own.

Words like "strategic," "collaborative," "results-focused" and "experienced leader" are only useful when they are backed by evidence. Without evidence, they sound like filler.

A stronger approach is to show the proof.

Instead of saying you are strategic, show the business decisions you influenced.

Instead of saying you are commercial, show the revenue, cost, margin, growth, risk or performance outcomes connected to your work.

Instead of saying you are a strong leader, show the teams you have built, the capabilities you have developed, the culture you have improved, or the performance shift you have driven.

This is how you move from claims to credibility.

What to check in your own positioning

Look at your resume and LinkedIn profile with fresh eyes.

Do not read them to yourself.

Read them as a recruiter, CEO, board member or hiring manager who does not know you.

Can they understand your level within 10 seconds?

Can they see the types of roles you are suitable for?

Can they understand the scale and complexity of your work?

Can they see what problems you solve?

Can they see evidence of impact?

Can they tell whether you are strategic, operational or both?

Can they explain your value to someone else?

Can they see why you are ready for your next move?

If the answer is no, your positioning needs work.

That does not mean you are not good enough.

It means your market message is not clear enough.

That is fixable.

Chapter Reflection

Before moving to the next chapter, take a hard look at how you currently present yourself.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Am I listing responsibilities instead of proving value?
- [ ] Am I relying on titles to explain my seniority?
- [ ] Are my achievements clear, specific, and business-focused?
- [ ] Does my LinkedIn profile support the roles I want next?
- [ ] Does my career story make sense to someone outside my current organisation?
- [ ] Am I making the reader work too hard?
- [ ] Can someone quickly understand what I should be considered for?

If you are not getting traction, this is often the place to start.

Not with more applications.

Not with more effort.

With clearer positioning.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Capable leaders get overlooked when their value is not clear.

The senior market does not reward hidden capability. It rewards clear positioning, relevant evidence and a strong value case.

Your experience may already be strong enough.

The question is whether the market can see it.

CHAPTER 3

Define the Role You Actually Want Next

A clear target role helps the market understand where you fit, what you solve and why your experience matters now.

CHAPTER 3

Define the Role You Actually Want Next

One of the most common mistakes senior professionals make is telling the market they are "open."

Open to different industries. Open to different roles. Open to different levels. Open to permanent, contract or consulting work. Open to finance, operations, strategy, transformation, commercial leadership or something broader if the right opportunity appears.

On the surface, this can sound sensible. Senior careers are rarely simple or linear. Many experienced professionals have built broad capability over many years, often across teams, functions, projects, change programs and difficult business environments. When you have operated across a wide range of problems, it can feel limiting to narrow your next move too much.

The problem is that "open" can easily sound unclear.

At the senior level, the market needs to understand where you fit. Recruiters need to know what roles to approach you for. Former colleagues need to understand how to refer to you. Hiring managers need to see why your background connects to the business problem they need solved. Your resume and LinkedIn profile need to send a clear signal before you ever have the chance to explain yourself in a conversation.

When your message is too broad, people may not know what to do with you. They may like you, respect you and even believe you are capable, but if they cannot quickly understand the role you are suited to, they are less likely to act. In a senior search, that matters because opportunities often move through referrals, searches, private conversations, and trusted networks before they become visible to the wider market.

Defining your next role is not a soft career exercise. It is a positioning exercise. You are not simply asking, "What do I want to do next?" You are asking, "Where does my experience create the clearest value in the market right now?" That is a much stronger question, and it will lead to a much stronger job search.

Why senior professionals struggle to define the next move

Many senior professionals reach a point where they know something needs to change, but they are not entirely clear on what that change should look like. They may have outgrown their current role, lost trust in the organisation, been through a restructuring, experienced burnout, hit a salary ceiling, or realised they want more meaning, more scope, or more commercial influence.

In some cases, the person is not unhappy with their career as a whole. They are simply no longer in the right environment. The role may have become too narrow, too political, too operational, too repetitive or too far removed from the type of work they do best. In other cases, the person knows they are ready for a larger role but has not yet worked out how to position themselves for it.

This is where the search can become reactive. A role appears online, so they apply. A recruiter calls, so they answer. A former colleague mentions something, so they look into it. Their resume is adjusted in different directions depending on the opportunity, their LinkedIn profile stays broad, and their career story becomes harder to explain.

Over time, this creates confusion. The person is busy, but the strategy is loose. They are active, but not necessarily focused. They may be applying for roles that are technically possible, but not strongly aligned. They may be having conversations that feel promising, but do not lead anywhere. They may be receiving feedback that they are impressive, but still not progressing.

The issue is not always capability. Often, the issue is that the market cannot see a clear enough thread.

Senior hiring is built around fit, evidence, timing and trust. If you cannot clearly explain what you want, why it makes sense and where your experience creates the strongest value, the market will struggle to place you with confidence.

"I'm open" is not a positioning strategy

There is a difference between being flexible and being unfocused.

Flexibility means you have a clear primary direction, but you are willing to consider aligned opportunities that make sense. Lack of focus means your message is so broad that people cannot easily understand what you are being considered for.

For example, a clear message might sound like this:

"I am targeting senior finance leadership roles where I can improve financial control, reporting quality and executive decision support. I am also open to broader commercial roles where my finance background can support performance improvement."

That gives the market something to work with. It has a clear function, a clear level and a clear value proposition. It also allows some room for aligned opportunities without making the person sound scattered.

An unclear message might sound like this:

"I am open to finance, operations, commercial, transformation, consulting or anything senior."

That may be honest, but it is not useful. It asks the listener to do too much work. They have to decide where you fit, what you want and how to describe you to someone else. Most people will not do that work for you.

This is why broad experience needs sharper positioning, not broader language. If your career has crossed several areas, you need to identify the common thread that connects your strongest work. You may have worked across finance, operations and transformation, but perhaps the real pattern is that you bring structure, commercial discipline and better decision making to complex environments.

That is the message.

Not every possible role you could do, but the strongest value you bring.

Start with the business problem, not the job title

Most people start their job search by looking at titles.

Chief Financial Officer. Head of Finance. General Manager. Director of Operations. Head of Transformation. Program Director. Commercial Director. Executive Director.

Titles matter, but they can be misleading. The same title can mean very different things depending on the organisation, ownership structure, sector, scale and reason for the hire.

A CFO in a founder-led business may need to bring discipline, funding support, investor confidence and commercial structure. A CFO in a listed company may need to manage board reporting, governance, risk, investor relations and a large finance team. A CFO in a turnaround environment may need to stabilise cash flow, reduce costs, rebuild controls and regain trust. The title may be the same, but the business problem is completely different.

That is why your next move should not be defined solely by title. It should be defined by the type of business problem you are best placed to solve.

Do you improve financial control? Do you bring order to messy environments? Do you lead growth? Do you fix underperforming teams? Do you improve reporting and decision-making? Do you reduce risk? Do you prepare businesses for sale, scale or investment? Do you bring discipline to organisations that have grown quickly but now need structure?

The clearer you are about the problem you solve, the stronger your positioning becomes.

A title tells people what you want.

The business problem tells people why you are relevant.

> **CLIENT EXAMPLE**
>
> A senior leader came to me after months of applying for a wide mix of roles. She had applied for Head of Finance, General Manager, Commercial Manager, Transformation Lead and several senior project roles. On paper, she had strong experience. She had led teams, improved reporting, supported senior decision-making and worked across business change.
>
> The issue was not that she lacked capability. The issue was that her search had no clear thread.
>
> Her resume was being adjusted for every role. Her LinkedIn profile was trying to cover too many angles. Her conversations with recruiters were broad, but not specific enough. She was trying to keep every door open, but the result was that the market could not clearly see where she belonged.
>
> We stepped back and looked at the work that had had the greatest impact on her career. The pattern was clear. She was at her best in complex financial environments where reporting, controls, stakeholder confidence, and commercial decision-making needed improvement. She could work across change and operations, but her strongest market position was senior finance leadership.
>
> Once we clarified that, everything became sharper. Her resume stopped trying to present her as five different things. Her LinkedIn profile was rebuilt around senior finance leadership, business performance, governance and executive decision support. Her recruiter conversations became more focused. Her target list became more useful.
>
> She did not become less capable by narrowing the message. She became easier to understand.
>
> That is the point. A clear target does not reduce your value. It makes your value easier for the right people to recognise.

Build your target role profile

Before you rewrite your resume or LinkedIn profile, you need to define your target role profile. This is not a wish list. It is a practical filter that helps you make better decisions about what to pursue, what to ignore and how to present yourself.

The first area to define is the role level. Are you targeting Head of Function, General Manager, Director, Executive Director, CFO, COO, CEO or board-level roles? Are you looking for a larger leadership role, or a similar level in a better environment? Are you moving from second-in-charge to functional lead? Are you moving from a specialist expert to a broader executive leader?

This matters because your documents must match the level you want. If you are aiming for a senior leadership role, but your resume reads like a technical operator, the market may underestimate you. Your positioning needs to reflect the level you are ready for, not only the title you currently hold.

The second area is function. You may have experience across finance, operations, people and culture, technology, risk, legal, marketing, sales, transformation, strategy or project delivery. Some senior professionals can work across several areas, but your market message still needs a centre of gravity. Without that centre, your positioning can feel scattered.

A stronger message might be, "I am a senior finance leader with broader commercial and transformation experience." That is much clearer than, "I am open to finance, commercial, strategy and transformation roles." The first has a clear centre. The second is too loose.

The third area is the business problem you solve. This is where your positioning becomes more valuable. Senior hiring is usually problem-led. Organisations do not hire senior people simply because they have a vacant box on an organisation chart. They hire because something needs to change, improve, stabilise, grow or be protected.

You may be strongest at improving financial control, reducing costs, driving growth, fixing broken processes, building high-performing teams, improving reporting quality, leading business change, strengthening governance, restoring stakeholder confidence, preparing a business for investment, or helping executives make better decisions. Once you know the problems you solve best, your resume, LinkedIn profile and interview examples can all support the same message.

The fourth area is organisation type. The same role can feel very different depending on the organisation. A large corporate is not the same as a founder-led business. A listed company is not the same as a private equity-backed business. A government agency is not the same as a not-for-profit. A high-growth business is not the same as a mature organisation with strong systems already in place.

You need to understand where your experience is most relevant and where your working style is likely to fit. Some people are excellent at ambiguity. Others do their best work when there is structure, governance and clear authority. Some people are at their best in transformation. Others are stronger in scale, control, growth or stabilisation. None of these is right or wrong; they are just different.

The fifth area is scale and scope. Senior roles are often assessed on a scale, including team size, revenue, budget, geographic reach, number of sites, regulatory exposure, project value, stakeholder complexity, and organisational size. If you are targeting a larger role, you need to understand the gap between your current scale and the scale required.

Moving from a $50M business to a $1B business is not impossible, but the market will want to understand how your experience translates. Moving from leading a team of five to a team of fifty requires evidence of leadership depth. Moving from a local role to a regional or global role requires proof that you can operate across more complex stakeholder environments. This is not about ruling yourself out. It is about understanding the case you need to make.

The sixth area is sector fit. In some roles, sector experience matters a great deal. In others, functional depth and leadership capability may matter more. Financial services, government, healthcare, infrastructure, energy, and highly regulated sectors often place strong emphasis on sector knowledge, risk, compliance, and stakeholder complexity. In other contexts, a person with strong transformation, commercial, finance or people leadership experience may be able to move across sectors more easily.

The key is to understand whether your target market will see your sector background as a strength, a gap or something that needs to be explained. If you want to move sectors, your positioning needs to focus on transferable value rather than generic transferable skills. Leading through regulation, improving governance, reducing costs, elevating reporting quality, building teams, and driving change can cross sectors, but only when you make the link clear.

The seventh area is your non-negotiables. Your next role should not be assessed only by title and salary. You also need to know what matters in practical terms. That may include minimum salary, bonus structure, location, flexibility, travel, reporting line, team size, culture, board exposure, decision-making authority, ethical fit, workload, growth path and level of autonomy.

Knowing your non-negotiables does not mean being difficult. It means making decisions with clarity. You can still compromise, but you should know what you are compromising on. Many senior professionals accept roles that look like progress on paper, only to find they have walked straight back into the same problems they were trying to leave.

The final area is proof. Once you know the role you want, identify the evidence that supports it. This is where many people miss the mark. They define their target, but they do not check whether their resume, LinkedIn profile and interview examples prove they are ready for it.

If you are targeting CFO roles, where is the evidence of financial leadership, board reporting, governance, commercial decision support, risk management, funding, transformation or team leadership? If you are targeting General Manager roles, where is the evidence of performance ownership, operational leadership, people leadership, customer outcomes, commercial accountability or cross-functional influence? If you are targeting transformation roles, where is the evidence of change delivery, stakeholder influence, governance, adoption, risk management and measurable business outcomes?

Your target role and your proof points need to match. If they do not, the market may see the ambition, but not the evidence.

Create your positioning sentence

Once you have worked through your target role profile, you should be able to create a simple positioning sentence. This is not necessarily a sentence you will use word-for-word on your resume, but it is a useful clarity tool.

Use this structure:

"I am targeting [level and function] roles where I can help [type of organisation] solve [business problem] by using my experience in [core strengths or evidence areas]."

For example:

"I am targeting senior finance leadership roles where I can help complex organisations improve financial control, reporting quality and executive decision support, using my experience across governance, business performance, stakeholder engagement and team leadership."

Or:

"I am targeting transformation leadership roles where I can help large organisations bring structure, delivery discipline and stakeholder alignment to complex change programs, using my experience across governance, program delivery and executive engagement."

Or:

"I am targeting General Manager roles where I can help service-based organisations improve operational performance, team accountability and customer outcomes, using my experience across commercial leadership, people leadership and business improvement."

This sentence helps you test whether your direction is clear. If you cannot write it, your market positioning is probably still too broad.

How this changes your search

Once your target role profile is clear, your search becomes more disciplined. You stop applying for roles simply because they look interesting. You stop rewriting your resume in a different direction every week. You stop having vague conversations with recruiters. You stop asking your network to "keep you in mind" without giving them enough context.

Instead, you can make stronger decisions. You can assess whether a role is genuinely aligned with your goals. You can identify which recruiters are relevant. You can update your LinkedIn profile with the right language. You can brief your network properly. You can prepare stronger interview examples. You can make your next move look logical rather than reactive.

This is important because senior hiring is not only about whether you can do the role. It is also about whether your career story makes sense.

A clear target role profile helps your story make sense.

It gives the market a stronger reason to understand you, remember you and refer you.

Do not confuse clarity with limitation

Some senior professionals resist this work because they fear that focus will limit them. They worry that defining a clear target will leave them missing out on other opportunities.

In practice, the opposite is usually true.

Clear positioning does not stop you from considering other roles. It simply gives the market a stronger starting point. You can still assess opportunities that sit slightly outside your primary target. You can still respond to recruiter approaches. You can still explore roles that have an unexpected fit.

But your core message needs to be clear enough for the right opportunities to find you.

A broad message does not make you more marketable. It often makes it harder for you to place.

The goal is not to reduce your options. The goal is to make the right options easier to identify.

Chapter Reflection

Before moving to the next chapter, take time to define your target role profile.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] What role level am I targeting next?
- [ ] What function or area gives me the strongest market credibility?
- [ ] What business problems am I best placed to solve?
- [ ] What type of organisation would value my experience most?
- [ ] What scale of role am I ready for?
- [ ] Which sectors are logical for me?
- [ ] Where do I have evidence, not just interest?
- [ ] What are my non-negotiables?
- [ ] What am I willing to compromise on?
- [ ] Can I explain my target role in one clear sentence?

If you cannot answer these questions yet, do not rush to rewrite your resume. Clarity comes first. The resume comes after.

Practical Exercise

Your Target Role Profile

Write your answers under the following headings:

Target role titles:

Target level:

Primary function:

Secondary function if relevant:

Preferred organisation type:

Preferred sector or sectors:

Business problems I solve best:

Evidence that supports this target:

Minimum salary and package expectations:

Non-negotiables:

Flexible areas:

Roles I should stop applying for:

One sentence positioning statement:

This exercise may look simple, but it is useful because it forces you to stop reacting to the market and start making decisions with more intent.

KEY TAKEAWAY

If you are too broad, the market may not know where to place you.

Defining your next role is not about limiting your career. It is about making your value clearer to the people who can refer, approach, shortlist and hire you.

Before you update your resume, improve your LinkedIn profile or speak to recruiters, you need to know what you are positioning yourself for.

Clarity comes before visibility. At the senior level, that clarity is often what separates the people who get traction from those who keep getting overlooked.

CHAPTER 4

Build a Resume That Shows Value, Not Duties

At senior level, your resume is not a record of employment. It is a business case for your value.

CHAPTER 4

Build a Resume That Shows Value, Not Duties

A senior resume is not a career archive.

It is not a storage place for every task, project, system, meeting, committee, responsibility and role you have ever held. It is not a job description copied into a document. It is not a historical record of employment dressed up with better formatting.

At the senior level, your resume is a business case.

Its job is to help the reader understand the level you operate at, the problems you solve, the value you create, the judgement you bring, and why you should be considered for the role in front of them. It needs to make your experience easier to assess, not harder. It needs to demonstrate the commercial value of your work, not just the activities associated with your role.

This is where many senior professionals lose traction.

They have strong experience, but their resume does not make that experience clear enough. It may be accurate, but it is still weak. It may be detailed, but not persuasive. It may include a long list of responsibilities, but fails to show what improved, changed, grew, stabilised, reduced or strengthened because of their leadership.

That distinction matters.

A resume can be factually correct and still fail to position you properly. It can be well formatted and still leave the reader unsure of your value. It can include impressive employers and senior titles, yet still read too much like a job description.

The stronger question is not, "What did I do?"

The stronger question is, "What did my work make possible?"

That is the question a senior resume needs to answer.

Why duties are not enough

Most senior resumes are too responsibility-focused. They explain what sat inside the person's remit, but not why that remit mattered. They describe activity, but not business value. They show what the person was involved in, but not the outcome of their involvement.

For example, a finance leader might write that they were responsible for financial reporting, budgeting, forecasting, audit, stakeholder management and team leadership. All of that may be true, but it does not tell the reader enough. It does not show the scale of the environment, the quality of the work, the level of influence, the complexity of the decisions or the results created.

At the senior level, the reader needs context.

They need to understand whether you led a team of three or thirty. They need to know whether you were managing a small local budget or supporting a $500M operating environment. They need to see whether your reporting was routine or whether it helped the executive team make better decisions during a difficult commercial period. They need to know whether your stakeholder engagement was day-to-day communication, or whether it involved influencing CEOs, boards, regulators, investors, unions, government agencies or senior customers.

A duty tells the reader what you touched.

A value statement explains why it mattered.

That is the shift.

Instead of writing "managed budgeting and forecasting," you might write that you led budgeting and forecasting across a complex operating environment, improving cost visibility, supporting more disciplined planning and giving senior leaders greater confidence in the numbers.

The second version still describes the function, but it also explains the value. It tells the reader what the work supported and why it mattered to the business.

Your resume must prove level

One of the most important jobs of a senior resume is to prove level.

A title alone does not always do this.

A Head of Finance in one organisation may hold CFO level accountability. In another organisation, that same title may sit beneath several layers of leadership. A General Manager role may involve full commercial ownership or be largely operational. A Director title may signal executive influence, or it may sit within a narrower technical function.

The market cannot rely on titles alone.

Your resume needs to show the actual level of the work.

That means including enough context for the reader to understand the scale and complexity of your role. This may include team size, budget, revenue, cost base, reporting line, board exposure, geographic scope, number of sites, number of entities, regulatory exposure, project value, stakeholder complexity and the type of decisions you influenced.

Without that context, the reader may underestimate you.

For example, "led the finance function" is too broad on its own. It tells the reader the function, but not the level. A stronger version might explain that you led a finance team of 12 across financial control, reporting, budgeting, and governance, providing executive- and board-level insight in a $450M operating environment.

That gives the reader something to assess.

It shows leadership scope. It shows commercial scale. It shows the type of audience you supported. It helps the market understand the level at which you have already operated.

This matters because senior shortlisting is not only about whether you have done similar work. It is also about whether you have done it at the right level, in the right context, with enough complexity to be credible for the next role.

The profile section sets the frame

The profile section at the top of your resume has to work hard.

It is often the first section that a recruiter, hiring manager, search consultant, or senior decision-maker will read. If it is vague, generic or full of broad claims, it weakens the rest of the document before the reader has even reached your career history.

Many profiles say things like:

"Strategic and results-focused leader with strong communication skills, a proven track record and the ability to work across complex environments."

The problem is not that these words are wrong. The problem is that they are overused and too general. They do not tell the reader what type of leader you are, what level you operate at, what kind of environments you understand or what value you bring.

A stronger executive profile should answer five questions quickly.

Who are you?

What level do you operate at?

What type of work are you known for?

What business value do you bring?

Why are you relevant to the role you want next?

The profile does not need to tell your whole story. It should not try to include every strength or every career detail. Its job is to give the reader a clear lens through which to view the rest of the resume.

For example:

Senior finance leader with deep experience across financial control, executive reporting, governance and business performance in complex operating environments. Known for improving reporting quality, strengthening controls and giving executive teams clearer insight to support better commercial decisions.

That profile works because it has a clear function, level, and value. It tells the reader what to look for in the rest of the document.

The rest of the resume then needs to back it up.

Key strengths should not read like a keyword dump

Many resumes include a key skills section that is little more than a list of words.

Financial reporting. Budgeting. Forecasting. Leadership. Stakeholder management. Communication. Governance. Problem solving. Business improvement.

These skills may be relevant, but on their own, they are weak. They do not show how the person applies those skills, what level they operate at or what impact they have had.

At the senior level, key strengths should read more like impact areas.

Instead of simply writing "stakeholder management," explain the nature of the stakeholder work. Did you influence CEOs, boards, executives, regulators, unions, investors, customers or government bodies? Did your work support decisions, reduce risk, align competing priorities or restore trust?

Instead of writing "business transformation," explain the type of change you led. Was it a finance transformation, operating model shift, system implementation, merger integration, restructure, cost program, digital change or governance uplift? What problem did it solve?

Instead of writing "leadership," show what kind of leadership. Did you build teams, reset performance, improve culture, coach managers, lift accountability, stabilise a function or lead people through uncertainty?

A senior strengths section should provide the reader with evidence of capability, not just a list of labels.

For example:

Executive Decision Support: Trusted by CEOs, CFOs and senior leaders to provide clear financial insight, challenge assumptions and improve the quality of business decisions.

Financial Control and Governance: Strengthens reporting, controls, audit readiness and financial discipline across complex operating environments.

Business Performance Improvement: Identifies cost, process and performance issues, then works with leaders to improve visibility, accountability and commercial outcomes.

These examples still include keywords, but they also explain value. That is the difference.

Each role needs a clear mandate

One of the best ways to make a senior resume stronger is to begin each role with a clear mandate.

The mandate is a short paragraph that explains the purpose, scope and context of the role. It explains why the role existed, what the person was brought in or trusted to do, and the level of accountability they held.

Without a mandate, the resume can feel like a loose list of bullets. The reader has to work out the context for themselves. That is not ideal, especially when the role title does not fully explain the level or complexity of the work.

A strong mandate might include the organisation's size, the business context, the reporting line, the remit, the leadership scope, and the role's main purpose.

For example:

Appointed to lead financial control, reporting, budgeting and governance across a multi-entity operating environment, supporting executive decision making, audit readiness and improved visibility over business performance.

That one paragraph gives the reader a much clearer frame. It explains the role beyond the title. It shows function, context and purpose.

The bullets that follow can then expand on the most relevant areas of responsibility and impact.

Responsibilities still matter, but they need to show ownership

Some people believe that senior resumes should include only achievements. I do not agree.

Responsibilities still matter because they show scope, authority and leadership accountability. However, they need to be written properly.

A responsibility should not sound like a task. It should show what the person owned, influenced, led, improved or was trusted to manage.

For example, instead of:

Prepared monthly reports.

A stronger version might be:

Led monthly performance reporting for the executive team, improving visibility over revenue, cost, risk and operational performance.

Instead of:

Managed stakeholders.

A stronger version might be:

Partnered with senior leaders across finance, operations and commercial teams to improve planning discipline, resolve performance issues and support stronger business decisions.

Instead of:

Oversaw audit process.

A stronger version might be:

Directed year-end audit preparation, strengthening documentation, resolving control gaps and improving confidence in financial governance.

The stronger versions do not inflate the work. They explain the purpose of the work.

That is what senior resumes need.

Achievements should lead with the business benefit

Achievements are where many resumes become weak.

The most common mistake is burying the outcome at the end of the sentence, or leaving it out altogether.

For example:

Implemented a new reporting process across the finance team, reducing the month-end close time by five days.

This is fine, but the stronger version leads with the result:

Reduced the month-end close time by five days by implementing a new reporting process, improving workflow, accountability and reporting discipline across the finance team.

The difference is subtle, but important.

When the business benefit appears first, the reader immediately understands why the achievement matters. This is especially useful for senior resumes because the reader is scanning for value.

Achievements should answer one or more of these questions:

What improved?

What was reduced?

What was increased?

What risk was removed?

What decision was supported?

What cost was saved?

What revenue was protected or grown?

What process became faster or stronger?

What team capability improved?

What confidence, visibility or control was created?

Not every achievement needs a hard number, but every achievement should have a clear benefit.

Some benefits are financial, such as revenue growth, cost reduction, margin improvement or savings. Some are operational, such as faster reporting, improved workflow, stronger controls or better service delivery. Some are strategic, such as improved board confidence, better decision-making, stronger governance, or increased readiness for growth.

The key is to make the benefit clear.

Quantify where you can, but do not force numbers

Numbers are powerful in a resume, but they need to be meaningful.

A resume that includes relevant numbers instils confidence in the reader. It helps them understand scale, impact and credibility. Numbers can include revenue, budgets, cost savings, team size, percentage improvements, project value, number of sites, number of entities, reporting time reductions, audit findings, customer outcomes, growth figures or operating costs.

However, not every contribution can be measured neatly.

Some senior work is about judgement, risk, influence, governance, leadership and decision quality. These things matter, even when they do not translate into a simple metric.

The answer is not to invent numbers or force weak metrics into the resume. The answer is to be specific about the benefit.

For example:

Strengthened board reporting by improving the quality, accuracy and clarity of financial insight, enabling directors to assess performance, risk and investment decisions with greater confidence.

There may not be a percentage in that statement, but the value is clear.

A good resume uses numbers where they strengthen the point and clear business language where the value is qualitative.

> **CLIENT EXAMPLE**
>
> A senior finance candidate came to me with a resume that was technically accurate but completely undersold her.
>
> She had led financial reporting, improved controls, supported executive decisions and managed complex audit requirements. She had also influenced senior stakeholders and helped the organisation improve confidence in its numbers during a period of change.
>
> But her resume made her sound as if she were simply producing reports and supporting routine finance activities.
>
> The problem was not the experience. The problem was the way the experience was framed.
>
> Her bullets were written from the task up, rather than from the business value down. They explained what she did each month, but they did not show the result of her work. The resume did not make it clear that her reporting improved decision-making, that her control work reduced risk, and that her stakeholder support helped senior leaders better understand performance.
>
> We rebuilt the resume around level, scope and value. We clarified the mandate of each role, revised the responsibilities to demonstrate ownership and judgement, and reworked the achievements to prioritise business benefit.
>
> The result was a much stronger senior finance document. It still reflected the truth of her experience, but it finally made the value visible.
>
> That is the point of a senior resume.
>
> Not to make someone sound like someone they are not.
>
> To make the real value of their work easier to understand.

Your resume and LinkedIn profile must align

Your resume and LinkedIn profile do not need to be identical, but they should support the same market message.

If your resume positions you as a senior finance leader but your LinkedIn profile looks like that of a general accountant, that creates confusion. If your resume points to executive leadership but your LinkedIn headline lists only your current title, you are missing an opportunity. If your resume shows commercial impact but your LinkedIn profile is thin, outdated or unclear, the market may not get the full picture.

Senior decision makers often check both.

A recruiter may find you on LinkedIn first, then ask for a resume. A hiring manager may read your resume first, then check your LinkedIn profile. A former colleague may refer you and send someone to your profile. An executive search consultant may compare both before deciding whether to contact you.

The two documents should reinforce each other.

Your resume can hold more details. LinkedIn can support visibility, credibility and search. Together, they should make it clear who you are, what level you operate at, what problems you solve and what value you bring.

If the two tell different stories, your positioning becomes weaker.

You do not need to rewrite your resume for every role

A common mistake is rewriting the resume from scratch for every application.

Some adjustment is useful. You should always check whether the resume aligns with the role, the advertisement's language, and the most relevant proof points. But if you are rewriting the whole document every time, there is usually a deeper problem.

It often means your core positioning is unclear.

A strong senior resume should have a clear foundation. The core message should not change every week. Your level, value, leadership scope, commercial impact and strongest proof points should remain consistent.

What changes is the emphasis.

In one role, you may elevate finance transformation. For another, you may give more weight to governance. For another, you may highlight stakeholder influence, cost control, growth, reporting improvement or people leadership.

But the core story should remain steady.

If your resume has to become a completely different document for every role, you may need to revisit your target role profile and clarify what you are actually positioning yourself for.

Common senior resume problems

When reviewing your resume, look for the issues that weaken senior positioning.

The first is too much task language. If your resume is full of words such as prepared, supported, assisted, attended, helped, and contributed, it may make you sound more junior than you are.

The second is a lack of context. If the reader cannot see the size of the business, team, budget, function, project or stakeholder group, they may not understand the level of your experience.

The third is buried impact. If the result appears at the end of the bullet or is missing altogether, the reader has to work too hard to find the value.

The fourth is generic leadership language. Saying you are collaborative, strategic or results-focused does not mean much unless the resume proves it.

The fifth is weak role framing. If each role begins with bullets and no context, the reader may struggle to understand why the role mattered.

The sixth is trying to include too much. A senior resume should be strong, not crowded. More information does not always create more confidence. Sometimes it creates more noise.

The seventh is misalignment with the next move. If your resume is written around where you have been rather than where you are going, it may not support the roles you want now.

A practical way to review your resume

Read each role in your resume and ask yourself three questions.

First, does this section show the level at which I operated?

Second, does it show the value I created?

Third, does it support the role I want next?

If the answer is no, the content needs work.

Then look at each bullet and ask:

Is this a task or a value statement?

Does it show ownership?

Does it show context?

Does it show impact?

Could someone outside my organisation understand why this mattered?

If the answer is no, rewrite it.

This process can feel uncomfortable at first because it forces you to move away from describing your job and towards explaining your contribution. That is the point. Senior resumes need to show contribution.

Chapter Reflection

Before moving to the next chapter, review your current resume with a critical eye.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Does my profile clearly show who I am and what value I bring?
- [ ] Does my resume demonstrate the level at which I operate?
- [ ] Have I included enough context around scale, scope and complexity?
- [ ] Do my responsibilities show ownership, judgement, and leadership?
- [ ] Do my achievements lead with the business benefit?
- [ ] Have I included numbers where they strengthen the point?
- [ ] Does the resume read like a business case or a list of duties?

- [ ] Does it support the role I want next?
- [ ] Would a recruiter, CEO, or hiring manager quickly understand my value?

If not, your resume may not be weak due to a lack of experience. It may be weak because the experience has not been positioned properly.

Practical Exercise

Turn Duties Into Value

Choose three bullets from your current resume that describe duties.

For each one, answer these questions:

What was the purpose of this work?

Who relied on it?

What problem did it solve?

What improved because of it?

Was there a measurable result?

What would have happened if this work had not been done well?

Then rewrite the bullet so it starts with the value, not the task.

For example:

Before:

Managed monthly reporting for senior leaders.

After:

Improved executive visibility over business performance by leading monthly reporting, strengthening analysis and giving senior leaders clearer insight into revenue, cost and risk.

This is the same work, but the value is clearer.

That is how a senior resume becomes stronger.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Your resume should not simply record your career.

It should make your value clear.

At the senior level, the market needs more than duties, titles and responsibilities. It needs evidence of level, scope, judgement, and business impact.

The stronger your resume is, the easier it becomes for recruiters, hiring managers, CEOs and boards to understand why you should be considered.

A good senior resume does not make you sound bigger than you are.

It makes the value you already bring easier to see.

CHAPTER 5

Make LinkedIn Work Like a Search Asset

Your LinkedIn profile should help the right people find you, understand you and see why you are relevant.

CHAPTER 5

Make LinkedIn Work Like a Search Asset

For senior professionals, LinkedIn is no longer optional.

It is one of the first places recruiters, search consultants, hiring managers, CEOs, board members, and former colleagues will go to understand who you are, what you do, and whether you are relevant for the role or opportunity in front of them.

This does not mean LinkedIn replaces your resume. It does not. Your resume still has a different job. It gives more detail, more evidence and more role-specific information. LinkedIn has a broader purpose. It helps you appear in search results, gives people a quick view of your value, and supports your credibility before, during, and after the hiring process.

This is where many senior professionals underuse it.

They treat LinkedIn like a digital version of their CV. They add their job titles, employers, dates and a few lines about each role, then leave it untouched for years. They may update it only when they are actively looking, or worse, only after they have already missed opportunities.

At the senior level, that is a problem.

LinkedIn is not just a place people check when you apply for a role. It is a place where opportunities can begin. Recruiters use it to search. Executive search consultants use it to identify potential candidates. Hiring managers use it to validate first impressions. Your network uses it to understand what you do now and where you may fit next.

If your profile is unclear, too thin or out of date, you may be losing opportunities you never even knew existed.

LinkedIn is not just about being active

Many people confuse LinkedIn visibility with posting.

Posting can help. Commenting can help. Building a visible professional presence can support credibility, especially if you are sharing useful views, relevant insight and clear thinking in your area of expertise.

But posting is not the same as being findable.

You can post every day and still have a weak profile. You can be visible to your existing network but invisible to recruiters searching for specific skills, titles, sectors and leadership experience. You can attract engagement from peers but still fail to clearly show up for the roles you want.

The foundation of LinkedIn is not activity.

The foundation is positioning.

Before you worry about posting, newsletters, comments or content strategy, your profile needs to answer the basics clearly. Who are you? What level do you operate at? What problems do you solve? What value do you bring? What roles should people associate with you? What language would recruiters use to find someone like you?

If your profile does not answer those questions, activity will only take you so far.

A strong LinkedIn profile works quietly in the background. It gives the market a clearer signal. It helps the right people understand you faster. It makes it easier for recruiters, search consultants, and decision-makers to see why you may be relevant.

That is the real value.

Recruiters search; they do not scroll

One of the biggest misunderstandings about LinkedIn is the belief that recruiters sit there scrolling through posts, waiting to stumble across the right candidate.

That is not how most serious senior searches work.

Recruiters and search consultants use search. They look for job titles, skills, sectors, locations, seniority markers, qualifications, companies, functions and keywords that match the brief they have been given. They create search strings. They filter. They compare. They scan.

If your profile does not contain the right language, you may not appear in the right searches.

This is not about keyword stuffing. It is about using the language the market already uses to find people like you.

For example, if you are targeting CFO, Head of Finance or Financial Controller roles, your profile needs to include language around financial leadership, governance, reporting, budgeting, forecasting, controls, audit, commercial decision support, board reporting, risk, business performance and stakeholder influence where those areas are relevant to your background.

If you are targeting transformation roles, your profile needs to demonstrate change leadership, program delivery, governance, stakeholder alignment, operating model improvement, systems implementation, risk management, and measurable business outcomes, if those areas reflect your experience.

If you are targeting General Manager or Operations leadership roles, your profile needs to show commercial ownership, operational performance, people leadership, customer outcomes, cost control, service delivery, growth, process improvement and accountability.

The words matter because search is language-based.

If the right words are missing, your experience may not be visible.

Your headline needs to do more than list your current title

Your LinkedIn headline is one of the most valuable parts of your profile.

It appears in search results, connection requests, comments and profile previews. It is often the first line people see before deciding whether to click through and read more.

Many senior professionals waste it.

They use only their current title and employer. For example:

Head of Finance at ABC Group

That may be accurate, but it is narrow. It tells the reader where you are now, but not enough about your broader value or the roles you may be relevant for.

A stronger headline gives the market more context.

For example:

Senior Finance Leader | Financial Control, Governance, Executive Reporting and Business Performance | Supporting Better Commercial Decisions

This headline tells the reader more. It still clearly positions the person in finance, but it adds leadership scope, key areas of value, and business relevance.

Another example:

Transformation Leader | Program Governance, Operating Model Change and Stakeholder Alignment | Delivering Complex Business Improvement

Again, this does more than state a title. It creates a clearer market signal.

Your headline should not be packed with empty words. It should not try to be clever. It should not be so broad as to say everything and nothing. It should help the right people quickly understand your level, function, and value.

A good test is simple.

If a recruiter saw only your name, photo and headline in search results, would they understand why you might be relevant?

If not, your headline needs work.

Your About section should frame your value

The About section is often one of the weakest parts of a senior LinkedIn profile.

Some people leave it blank. Some write personal statements that sound too generic. Some write in the third person and sound disconnected from their own career. Others paste in a dense block of text from their resume.

None of these approaches is ideal.

Your About section should give people a clear, human and commercially relevant summary of who you are. It should explain what you do, the problems you solve, the kind of experience you bring, and the value you are known for.

This section does not need to tell your whole story. It needs to frame your story.

For a senior finance leader, the About section might explain that they improve financial control, reporting quality, governance and decision support across complex organisations. It might mention experience working with executive teams, boards, auditors and operational leaders. It might show the value of their work through stronger visibility, better planning, improved controls and clearer commercial insight.

For a transformation leader, it might mean they help organisations bring structure, discipline, and stakeholder alignment to complex change programs. It might show experience across system implementation, governance, operating model change, risk management and adoption.

For a general manager, it might show commercial ownership, people leadership, operational performance, customer outcomes and business improvement.

The point is not to write something that sounds impressive.

The point is to write something that makes your value easy to understand.

Your experience section needs enough substance

Many senior professionals have a LinkedIn experience section that is far too thin.

They list the company, title and dates, then include one or two vague lines about the role. Sometimes they leave the experience section almost empty because they assume the resume will carry the details.

That is a missed opportunity.

LinkedIn does not need the same depth as your resume, but it still needs enough substance to support your positioning. If someone finds you through search or referral, your profile should give them a clear sense of what you have done and why it matters.

Each recent senior role should include a short summary of scope and impact. This may include the size of the organisation, the function led, the type of stakeholders supported, the business problems addressed and the key outcomes delivered.

For example, instead of writing:

Responsible for finance operations, reporting and budgeting.

A stronger LinkedIn version might say:

Led finance operations, reporting, budgeting and governance across a complex operating environment, supporting executive decision making, strengthening financial control and improving visibility over business performance.

That gives the reader more context. It shows the function, purpose, and value of the work.

You do not need to include every achievement. You do need to include enough evidence to make the profile feel credible.

> **CLIENT EXAMPLE**
>
> A senior leader came to me after feeling frustrated that recruiters were approaching her for roles below her level.
>
> She had strong experience, but her LinkedIn profile was working against her. Her headline only listed her current job title. Her About section was brief and generic. Her experience section read like an internal role description, with very little about leadership scope, commercial impact or senior stakeholder influence.
>
> The profile was not wrong, but it was sending the wrong signal.
>
> It made her look narrower than she was.
>
> When we reviewed her target roles, it became clear that she wanted to be considered for broader senior leadership opportunities. She had the experience to support that move, but her profile did not make it clear. It was still anchored in her current title rather than the value she could bring next.
>
> We rebuilt the profile around level, function and market relevance. Her headline was updated to show her broader leadership value. Her About section was rewritten to explain the business problems she solved. Her experience section was strengthened to show scope, influence and outcomes.
>
> The aim was not to make her profile louder.
>
> It was to make it clearer.
>
> Within a short period, the quality of recruiter approaches improved. She was no longer being seen only through the lens of her current title. Her profile gave people a stronger reason to understand her seniority and consider her for more relevant roles.
>
> That is what LinkedIn can do when it is positioned properly.

Your profile should support both search and trust

LinkedIn has two jobs.

The first is search. Your profile needs to contain the right language so you can be found for relevant opportunities.

The second is trust. Once someone lands on your profile, it needs to make them feel confident in your credibility.

Search without trust is not enough. You may appear in results, but if your profile is vague, incomplete or inconsistent, people may move on.

Trust without search is also not enough. You may have a beautifully written profile, but if it does not include the right role and sector language, the right people may never find it.

The strongest profiles do both.

They include clear keywords without sacrificing readability. They show value, but not in a way that feels inflated. They include enough detail to create confidence, but not so much that the profile becomes heavy and difficult to read.

Your profile should feel like a clear professional introduction.

It should help someone understand where you fit, what you bring and why it may be worth having a conversation.

Your LinkedIn profile should match your next move

One of the biggest mistakes senior professionals make is building their LinkedIn profile around where they have been rather than where they want to go.

Your profile should still be truthful. It should not pretend that you have done things you have not. It should not inflate your title or overstate your achievements. But it should place the right emphasis on the experience most relevant to your next move.

If you want to move into a CFO role, your profile needs to give proper weight to finance leadership, governance, commercial decision support, board reporting, risk, controls, business performance and leadership scope.

If you want to move into a broader GM role, your profile needs to show more than functional expertise. It needs to show commercial ownership, operational influence, people leadership and business outcomes.

If you want to move into transformational leadership, your profile needs to show change complexity, stakeholder alignment, governance, delivery discipline and adoption.

This is not about rewriting your history.

It is about organising your history around your future direction.

A profile that only reflects your current role may keep you stuck in the way the market already sees you. A profile that reflects your next level helps shift that perception.

Keywords need context

Keywords matter, but they need to be used properly.

A profile full of disconnected keywords can look forced. It may help search visibility in a basic sense, but it does not always build trust. Senior decision makers still need to understand the substance behind the words.

For example, listing "strategy, leadership, governance, transformation, stakeholder management, commercial acumen" does not say much on its own.

A stronger approach is to use those words in context.

Instead of simply listing governance, explain that you strengthened governance across a complex reporting environment.

Instead of simply listing transformations, explain that you led change across systems, processes, and the operating model.

Instead of simply listing stakeholder engagement, explain that you influenced senior stakeholders across finance, operations, technology and executive leadership to support better decisions.

This approach helps with search, but it also gives the reader a clearer view of your value.

The aim is not to stuff your profile with keywords.

The aim is to use the right language in a way that still sounds credible and human.

Recommendations and social proof still matter

Recommendations are not the most important part of LinkedIn, but they can support credibility when used well.

A good recommendation gives people a sense of how you work, what you are trusted with and the value you bring. This can be useful for senior professionals, especially when the recommendation comes from a credible person such as a CEO, CFO, board member, senior leader, peer, client or major stakeholder.

The best recommendations are specific.

A weak recommendation says:

"She is great to work with and very professional."

A stronger recommendation says:

"She provided clear financial insight during a complex period of change, helped strengthen reporting discipline and gave the executive team greater confidence in key business decisions."

The second version tells the reader much more. It supports the positioning. It gives evidence of value. It makes the profile stronger.

If you ask for recommendations, do not leave the person guessing. Give them a prompt. Ask them to comment on the type of work you did, the problem you helped solve and the value they saw from working with you.

This makes the recommendation more useful and less generic.

Content can support positioning, but only when it has a point

Posting on LinkedIn can help senior professionals build visibility, but only when the content aligns with how they want to be known.

You do not need to post every day. You do not need to become a content creator. You do not need to share personal stories if that does not feel right for you. But it can be useful to engage with the market in a way that reflects your judgement, experience and point of view.

This might include thoughtfully commenting on sector issues, sharing a brief perspective on leadership, posting about lessons from transformation, discussing commercial decision-making, or adding insight to conversations in your field.

The key is relevance.

Your content should support the professional reputation you want to build. If you want to be seen as a senior finance leader, your content should reinforce commercial thinking, decision support, governance, performance or leadership. If you want to be seen as a transformation leader, your content should show how you think about change, stakeholder alignment, delivery and risk.

Posting for attention alone rarely helps. Posting with a clear point can.

Even if you do not post often, the way you comment matters. Thoughtful comments on relevant posts can make you more visible to the right people. They can also show how you think, which is often more useful than simply liking posts in silence.

Your network needs to understand your positioning

LinkedIn is not only about recruiters.

It is also about your network.

Former colleagues, clients, peers, senior leaders, board members, suppliers and industry contacts may all become part of your next opportunity. But they can only refer you properly if they understand what you do and where you fit.

This is another reason your profile needs clarity.

If someone visits your profile after speaking with you, it should reinforce the message. If they want to recommend you, they should give them the language to do that. If they know of an opportunity, it should help them connect the dots between the role and your value.

A vague profile makes referrals harder.

A clear profile makes them easier.

That matters because senior roles often move through conversations before they move through the process.

Common LinkedIn mistakes at the senior level

There are several common mistakes that weaken senior LinkedIn profiles.

The first is relying only on your current title. Your current title may not fully explain your market value or next step.

The second is leaving the About section blank or generic. This is prime positioning space and should not be wasted.

The third is having an experience section that is too thin. If there is no substance, people cannot assess your scope or impact.

The fourth is using broad phrases without proof. Words like strategic, collaborative and experienced do not help unless they are supported by context.

The fifth is failing to include relevant keywords. If the right words are missing, you may not show up in the right searches.

The sixth is letting the profile drift out of date. If your profile still reflects who you were five years ago, it may not support the roles you want now.

The seventh is having a resume and LinkedIn profile that tell different stories. They do not need to match word-for-word, but they should support the same positioning.

The eighth is ignoring LinkedIn until you need it. By the time you are actively searching, you want the profile to already be working for you.

A practical way to review your LinkedIn profile

When reviewing your LinkedIn profile, start at the top.

Look at your photo, headline and banner. Do they reflect the level you operate at? Do they look current and credible? Does your headline tell the market more than your current title?

Then read your About section. Does it explain who you are, what you do and what value you bring? Does it include the right language for the roles you want? Does it sound like a senior professional with a clear point of view, or does it sound vague?

Next, review your experience section. Does each recent role include enough context? Can the reader see scope, leadership, business problems and outcomes? Does the experience section support your next move, or only describe your past?

Then check your skills, recommendations, featured content and activity. Do they support the same message? Are there gaps? Are there outdated items that weaken your position? Are there useful proof points that should be more visible?

Finally, look at the whole profile as if you did not know you.

Would they know what roles to consider you for?

Would they understand your level?

Would they see the business value you bring?

Would they trust you enough to start a conversation?

If not, the profile needs work.

Chapter Reflection

Before moving on to the next chapter, take time to properly assess your LinkedIn profile.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Does my headline reflect my current title only, or does it show my broader value?
- [ ] Does my About section explain the business problems I solve?
- [ ] Have I included the right keywords for the roles I want next?
- [ ] Does my experience section show scope, level and impact?
- [ ] Would a recruiter know how to approach me?
- [ ] Would a former colleague know how to refer me?
- [ ] Does my profile support the same message as my resume?
- [ ] Am I being found for the right roles, or the wrong ones?

CHAPTER 6

Move Beyond Job Boards

The best senior opportunities are not always advertised, which means your search strategy needs to reach beyond online applications.

CHAPTER 6

Move Beyond Job Boards

Most senior professionals start their job search in the most obvious place.

They go to LinkedIn Jobs, Seek, Indeed, company websites, recruiter websites or executive job boards. They search by title, location, salary, sector or function. They save roles, set alerts and start applying. On the surface, this feels productive. There is movement. There is activity. There are roles to review and actions to take.

The problem is that job boards only show part of the market.

For junior- and mid-level roles, advertised applications may play a larger role in the process. At the senior level, the market works differently. Many roles are filled through search, referrals, direct approaches, internal succession planning, former colleagues, board networks, private conversations, and recruiter shortlists before they ever appear online.

Some roles are advertised because the process requires it. Some are advertised after a preferred candidate has already been identified. Some are advertised to test the market. Some are advertised because the organisation wants to create a broad pool, but the strongest candidates may already be known to the recruiter or hiring manager.

That does not mean advertised roles are pointless. They are not. They can be useful, and many senior professionals do secure roles through formal applications. But if your entire search depends on job boards, your strategy is too narrow.

At the executive level, you need to think beyond applications.

You need to understand how opportunities are created, discussed, referred to, and filled.

Why applications alone create weak traction

A job board search can feel logical because it gives you a clear process. You find a role, adjust your resume, write a cover letter, submit the application and wait. If you do not hear back, you move to the next role and repeat the process.

The issue is that this can become a volume game.

More applications. More versions of your resume. More waiting. More silence.

Over time, this can become emotionally draining. Senior professionals who are used to making decisions, leading teams and influencing outcomes suddenly find themselves stuck in a passive process. They submit applications to systems, wait for responses and receive little feedback.

This is where confidence starts to drop.

People start assuming the problem is their age, salary expectations, market value or ability. Sometimes real market factors are at play, but often the issue is the search method. If you rely solely on advertised roles, you are competing in the most visible part of the market, often against a large pool of candidates.

You may also be arriving too late.

By the time a senior role is advertised, conversations may already have happened. The recruiter may have already spoken to people in their network. The hiring manager may have already asked trusted contacts for names. The organisation may already have an internal candidate or a shortlist of people they want to assess.

This is not always fair, but it is common.

A stronger senior job search does not ignore advertised roles. It adds other routes to market.

Senior roles often start as conversations

Many senior opportunities begin before there is a formal advertisement.

A CEO may be frustrated with performance and start asking who could fix it. A board may know a leadership change is coming and begin quiet conversations. A CFO may be planning to restructure the finance function and ask their network who is strong. A private equity partner may need someone who can bring control and discipline to a portfolio business. A recruiter may be asked to map the market before a role is formally approved.

At this stage, there may be no job ad. There may not even be a final job description.

There is only a business problem and a conversation about who may be able to solve it.

This is why senior positioning matters so much. If people understand what you do, what problems you solve and where you are looking to move next, they are far more likely to think of you when these early conversations happen.

If your network does not know what you are looking for, they cannot refer you.

If recruiters do not understand your value, they may not include you in the right searches.

If your LinkedIn profile does not support your next move, you may not appear on a market map people are building.

If your career story is too broad, people may like you but not know where to place you.

The best search strategy starts before the job is advertised.

The hidden market is not magic

People often talk about the hidden job market as if it were mysterious. It is not.

It is simply the part of the market that moves through people before it moves through platforms.

It includes roles shared through trusted networks, search firms, direct approaches, referrals, private conversations, former colleagues, investors, board members, suppliers, clients and professional communities.

At the executive level, this is normal. Organisations take more care with senior appointments because the risk is higher. A poor hire can affect strategy, culture, performance, risk, customer satisfaction, staff confidence, and financial results. For that reason, employers often want to identify credible people through known channels, not just public applications.

This is why reputation and clarity matter.

People refer to those they can explain.

If someone cannot describe what you do in one or two sentences, they are less likely to refer you. If your LinkedIn profile does not back up the referral, the opportunity may fade. If your resume does not support the story, the process may stall.

The hidden market rewards people who are easy to remember and easy to explain.

That does not mean you need to be loud. It means you need to be clear.

CLIENT EXAMPLE

A senior professional came to me after months of applying online with very little response. She had strong experience, but her search had become almost entirely application-based. She would see a role, adjust her resume, submit the application and wait. When nothing came back, she assumed the market was not interested.

When we reviewed her search activity, the problem was obvious. She was putting nearly all of her energy into the most crowded part of the market.

Her resume also needed work, but the bigger issue was that no one in her network clearly knew what she was looking for. Former colleagues knew she was experienced, but not what type of role she wanted next. Recruiters had spoken with her in the past, but she had not reconnected with them in a focused way. Her LinkedIn profile showed her current role, but not the direction she was moving toward.

We changed the strategy.

First, we sharpened her positioning to help her clearly explain her value. Then we identified the roles, sectors and business problems where she was most relevant. From there, we built a list of recruiters, former colleagues, senior contacts and warm connections who could be approached with a clear message.

The shift was not dramatic on the surface. It was simply more disciplined.

Instead of saying, "Please keep me in mind," she could say, "I am looking at senior finance leadership roles where I can improve financial control, reporting quality and executive decision support in complex organisations."

That gave people something to work with.

Within weeks, she was having better quality conversations. Not every conversation led to an interview, and that is normal, but she was no longer sitting passively behind online applications. She had moved from waiting for roles to appear to creating more routes into the market.

That is the difference.

Your network needs a clear brief

Most people underuse their network because they are too vague.

They say things like:

"I am starting to look around."

"Please keep me in mind."

"I am open to opportunities."

"I would love to hear of anything suitable."

These messages are polite but weak. They ask too much of the other person. They do not explain what you want, what you are good at or what a relevant opportunity would look like.

A stronger network message gives people a clear brief.

It explains the type of role you are targeting, the level, the business problems you solve and the types of organisations where you are most relevant. It does not need to be long. It just needs to be clear.

For example:

"I am starting to look at senior finance leadership roles where I can improve reporting quality, financial control and executive decision support. I am most interested in complex organisations where finance needs to play a stronger role in business performance, governance and decision making."

That message is much easier to act on.

A former colleague may know someone hiring a Head of Finance. A recruiter may connect you with a relevant search. A senior contact may introduce you to a CFO. A board member may think of you when a private conversation comes up.

Your network cannot help you properly if they do not know what help looks like.

Recruiters need to understand where you fit

Recruiters are not career managers.

Their job is not to find you a role. Their job is to fill roles for their clients. This distinction matters because many professionals become frustrated with recruiters when they do not hear back. The issue is usually not personal. Recruiters respond when there is a match between your background and a brief they are working on.

Your role is to make that match easier to see.

That means your LinkedIn profile needs to contain the right language. Your resume needs to show level, scope and value. Your outreach message needs to be clear. Your target roles need to make sense.

If you contact a recruiter with a vague message, they may not know how to handle you. If you contact them with a clear positioning statement, they can make a faster decision about whether you fit their current or future searches.

For example:

"I am targeting CFO and Head of Finance roles in mid-market and complex private businesses where there is a need to improve financial control, board reporting, commercial decision support and governance. My background includes financial leadership, reporting improvement, audit readiness, stakeholder influence and team leadership."

That gives the recruiter a useful summary.

It does not guarantee a role, but it does make you easier to assess.

Direct approach can be useful when done well

The direct approach is not about sending cold messages to hundreds of people.

At the executive level, it needs to be selective and thoughtful. The aim is not to ask strangers for jobs. The aim is to build relevant conversations with people who operate in your target market.

This might include CEOs, CFOs, board members, investors, founders, sector leaders, former colleagues, alumni, suppliers, clients or senior professionals in organisations that interest you.

The message should be short, clear, and relevant.

You are not asking for a role. You are starting a conversation.

For example, if you are targeting senior finance leadership roles in growing private businesses, you may connect with CFOs, CEOs or investors in that space. Your message might refer to a shared sector, a mutual connection, a business issue, or a relevant interest. The goal is to open a useful conversation, not to push your resume on someone who hasn't asked for it.

This approach requires judgement.

Poor direct outreach can damage your credibility. Generic messages, long explanations, pressure, overselling and desperate language do not work well. Senior people can quickly spot a mass message.

Good outreach is specific, respectful and clear.

Applications still matter, but they should be selective

Moving beyond job boards does not mean ignoring advertised roles.

It means becoming more selective about them.

At the executive level, you do not need to apply for every role that looks possible. You need to assess whether the role fits your target profile, whether your evidence supports it and whether there is a better way into the process.

Before applying, ask:

Is this role aligned with my target level?

Does the business problem match my strengths?

Do I have evidence that supports the key requirements?

Is the organisation type a good fit?

Do I know anyone connected to the company?

Is there a recruiter managing the process?

Can I create a warm route in, or am I relying only on the application portal?

If the answer is yes, the application may be worth pursuing. If the role is only loosely aligned, think carefully before spending energy on it.

A scattered application strategy can create false momentum. It feels busy, but it may not move you closer to the right role.

A selective approach gives you more time to improve the quality of each move.

Quality of activity matters more than volume

Many senior professionals measure search activity by the wrong numbers.

They count how many roles they applied for. How many resumes did they send? How many job alerts did they review? How many recruiters did they email? How many connection requests did they send?.

Activity matters, but quality matters more.

A better set of measures might include:

How many relevant conversations with recruiters have I had?

How many people in my network clearly understand what I am targeting?

How many warm introductions have I created?

How many decision makers have seen my profile?

How many conversations have given me market intelligence?

How many roles have I assessed properly before applying?

How many applications were supported by a referral or recruiter conversation?

How often am I being approached for roles that match my level?

These questions shift the focus from effort to effectiveness.

A senior job search should not be a numbers race.

It should be a focused market campaign.

Your search needs a weekly rhythm

A strong search needs structure.

Without structure, it is easy to spend hours scrolling job boards, making small resume changes and reacting to whatever appears that week. That creates stress without necessarily creating progress.

A better weekly rhythm might include a mix of activities.

Review advertised roles, but do not let them take over the whole week.

Identify recruiters who work in your function, sector and salary range.

Reconnect with former colleagues and senior contacts.

Comment thoughtfully on relevant LinkedIn posts.

Review target organisations.

Check whether your LinkedIn profile is aligned with the roles you want.

Track conversations, follow-ups and introductions.

Prepare examples for likely interview themes.

Review your positioning and adjust only when there is evidence that it needs to change.

This structure helps you stay active without becoming reactive.

It also helps you protect your confidence because you can see that your search is broader than waiting for online applications to convert.

Follow up without sounding desperate

Follow-up is important, but the tone matters.

At the senior level, you want to sound professional, clear and respectful. You do not want to sound anxious, pushy or entitled.

If you have spoken with a recruiter, follow up with a short note that reinforces your positioning and thanks them for the conversation. If you have applied for a role and have a contact involved in the process, a brief message can be helpful. If someone has offered to introduce you, make it easy for them by giving them a short summary they can pass on.

The easier you make it for people to help you, the more likely they are to do it.

This is another reason clarity matters. A strong follow-up does not need to explain your whole career. It simply needs to remind the person where you fit and why the conversation is relevant.

Common mistakes in a senior job search

There are several mistakes that weaken senior job searches.

The first is relying almost entirely on job boards.

The second is applying too broadly, which can dilute your message and drain your energy.

The third is changing the resume too much for each role, rather than fixing the core positioning.

The fourth is contacting recruiters without a clear brief.

The fifth is asking the network for help without explaining what help means.

The sixth is waiting until redundancy, burnout or frustration forces action.

The seventh assumes that silence means a lack of ability.

The eighth is treating LinkedIn as a profile rather than a search and credibility tool.

The ninth is failing to track conversations and follow-ups.

The tenth is staying passive for too long.

Each of these can be fixed, but only when you stop treating the job search as a simple application process.

At the senior level, your search needs to be more strategic, more visible and more connected.

Chapter Reflection

Before moving to the next chapter, look honestly at how you are currently approaching the market.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Am I relying too heavily on job boards?
- [ ] Do people in my network know what I am looking for?
- [ ] Can recruiters quickly understand where I fit?
- [ ] Is my LinkedIn profile helping me appear in relevant searches?
- [ ] Am I applying broadly because I am unclear?
- [ ] Am I tracking conversations, follow-ups and introductions?
- [ ] Am I creating warm routes into opportunities where possible?
- [ ] Do I have a weekly search rhythm, or am I reacting to whatever appears online?
- [ ] Am I measuring the quality of the activity, or only the volume?

If your search is producing silence, do not assume the market has rejected you. It may mean your route to market is too narrow.

Practical Exercise

Build Your Market Access List

Create a simple list under the following headings:

Recruiters who work in my function:

Recruiters who work in my sector:

Former colleagues who know my value:

Senior leaders I have worked with:

Board, investor or executive contacts:

Target organisations:

People connected to those organisations:

Professional associations or communities:

Warm contacts I can reconnect with this month:

Relevant conversations I need to follow up:

Next to each name or organisation, write the reason they are relevant. Do not contact people randomly. Build the list with intent.

Then write a short positioning message you can use when reconnecting.

For example:

"I am starting to explore senior finance leadership roles where I can help complex organisations improve financial control, reporting quality and executive decision support. I am particularly interested in roles where finance can play a stronger role in governance, business performance and commercial decision making."

This gives people a clear brief.

That is what your market access strategy needs.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Job boards are only one part of the senior market.

If you rely on applications alone, you may miss the roles being filled through search, referral, direct approach and private conversations.

A stronger senior job search is not about applying for more roles. It is about becoming easier to find, easier to refer to, and easier to understand.

The market cannot consider you for opportunities it cannot connect you to.

Your job is to make that connection clearer.

CHAPTER 7

Build a Referral and Search Strategy

People can only refer, recommend and approach you when they understand what you do and where you fit.

CHAPTER 7

Build a Referral and Search Strategy

At the executive level, your network is not just a list of people you know.

It is part of your market access.

The strongest opportunities often come through people before they come through platforms. A former colleague hears about a leadership change. A CFO mentions that their organisation needs stronger commercial support. A board member knows a CEO is quietly looking for someone to lead change. A recruiter is building a shortlist and asks trusted contacts who they rate. A private conversation starts before the role is public.

This is why a senior job search cannot rely only on advertised applications.

Your network, recruiter relationships and search visibility need to work together. If those three things are weak or disconnected, you may miss opportunities that are never openly advertised. If they are strong and clear, you become easier to refer to, easier to approach and easier to consider.

This does not mean you need to turn yourself into a loud self-promoter. It does not mean messaging everyone you have ever met or asking people for jobs. That usually feels awkward, and it rarely works well.

A good referral and search strategy is much more precise. It starts with a clear message, a focused target market and a practical plan for creating the right conversations.

Referrals depend on clarity

People can only refer you properly if they understand what you do and where you fit.

This sounds obvious, but it is where many senior professionals go wrong. They assume their network knows their value because people have worked with them before. That may be true in a narrow sense, but it does not mean those people understand what role you want next.

A former colleague may know you are capable, but not whether you are targeting CFO, Head of Finance, Commercial Director or General Manager roles. A past manager may respect your work, but not know whether you want to stay in the same sector or move into something broader. A peer may know you were excellent in your last organisation, but not know how to describe your value to someone else.

This is why vague outreach rarely produces strong referrals.

Messages like "please keep me in mind" or "let me know if you hear of anything" are easy to send, but they place all the thinking on the other person. They have to work out what kind of role would suit you, how to describe you and who to introduce you to. Most people will not do that unless the connection is close and the fit is obvious.

A stronger message gives them a clear brief.

It explains the level you are targeting, the type of problem you solve, and the sort of organisation for which your experience is relevant. It does not need to be long. It needs to be useful.

For example:

"I am starting to explore senior finance leadership roles where I can help complex organisations improve financial control, reporting quality and executive decision support. I am particularly interested in roles where finance needs to play a stronger role in governance, business performance and commercial decision making."

That message gives people something to work with. It makes the referral easier because the person does not need to guess your direction.

Clear positioning makes you more referrable.

Your network is broader than you think

Many senior professionals underestimate the size and value of their network.

They think first of close colleagues, current contacts or people they speak to regularly. Those people matter, but they are only one part of the picture.

Your network may include former managers, former peers, direct reports, clients, suppliers, auditors, consultants, recruiters, board members, investors, professional advisers, industry contacts, alumni, mentors, people you met through previous projects, people from professional associations and people who know your work through reputation rather than close friendship.

At the senior level, weak ties can be powerful.

A weak tie is someone who knows you, but not closely. They may not be part of your day-to-day world. They may not know every detail of your career. But they may sit in a different organisation, sector, or leadership circle, which can expose you to opportunities outside your immediate bubble.

This matters because your close network often knows the same information you do. Your broader network may know different people, companies, and opportunities.

The key is not to contact everyone randomly. That creates noise and can feel uncomfortable. The key is to group your network into useful categories and approach people with intent.

Start with people who know the quality of your work. Then identify people connected to your target organisations, sectors, recruiters, or decision-makers. From there, build a simple plan for reconnecting.

A strong senior referral strategy is not about volume.

It is about relevance.

CLIENT EXAMPLE

A senior leader came to me after relying almost entirely on applications for several months. She had a strong career, but very few people in her network knew she was open to a move. Even fewer understood what kind of role she wanted next.

She had avoided telling people because she did not want to look desperate. She also did not want her current employer to know she was considering a change. Both concerns were understandable, but the result was that she had become invisible to part of the market.

When we reviewed her network, there were clear opportunities she had not activated. Former colleagues had moved into senior roles. Past stakeholders were connected to organisations she wanted to target. Recruiters she had worked with years earlier were now operating in areas relevant to her next move. There were also senior contacts who would have been happy to refer her, but they had never been given a clear brief.

We built a focused list and created a simple message that positioned her around the problems she solved best. She was not asking people for a job. She was reconnecting, updating them on her direction and making it easier for them to think of her if something relevant came up.

The response changed quickly. Some people returned with market insights. Some introduced her to recruiters. Some suggested organisations worth watching. One contact mentioned a role that had not yet been advertised and offered to make an introduction.

That was the shift.

She moved from being passive in the market to being visible in the right conversations.

Recruiters are part of the strategy, not the whole strategy

Recruiters can be extremely useful, but they should not be treated as your only route to market.

A recruiter's job is to fill roles for their clients. They are not employed to manage your career. They will be interested when your background aligns with a live brief or a future search area. If there is no match, you may not hear much from them.

That is not always personal. It is how the model works.

This is why your job is to make your relevance easy to understand.

If you contact a recruiter with a broad message, they may not know where to place you. If your LinkedIn profile is unclear, they may not find you in the first place. If your resume reads too operationally, they may underestimate your level. If your target is too loose, they may not know which desk, client or search to connect you with.

A clear recruiter approach should include your target level, function, sectors of interest, core value proposition and any relevant salary or location parameters if appropriate.

For example:

"I am targeting CFO and Head of Finance roles in mid-market and complex private businesses where there is a need to improve financial control, board reporting, governance and commercial decision support. My background includes senior finance leadership, reporting improvement, audit readiness, stakeholder influence and team leadership."

That is useful to a recruiter.

It tells them where you fit. It helps them assess whether your background matches their market. It also makes it easier for them to remember you when something relevant appears.

Recruiter relationships need to be managed professionally. Follow up, but do not chase constantly. Stay visible, but do not become demanding. Share updates when they are relevant, such as a new target direction, a completed project, an updated resume, or a change in availability. Keep the relationship clear and respectful.

The aim is not to make one recruiter responsible for your search.

The aim is to build a group of relevant recruiters who understand where you fit.

Executive search works differently

Executive search is not the same as applying to a recruitment agency.

Search consultants are often engaged to find a specific type of candidate for a senior role. They may map the market, identify people in similar organisations, speak with trusted contacts, review LinkedIn profiles, approach potential candidates and build a shortlist for the client.

Sometimes the best candidates are not actively looking.

This is why your LinkedIn profile and reputation matter even when you are not in job search mode.

A search consultant may not know you personally. They may find you because your profile contains the right signals. They may hear your name through a referral. They may see your experience in a similar organisation. They may contact you because your background appears aligned with a role they are mapping.

If your profile is thin or unclear, you may be missed.

If your network cannot explain your value, you may not be recommended.

If your resume does not align with the level you want, you may not progress beyond the first conversation.

Search is built on market signals. Your job is to make sure those signals are clear.

Direct conversations can create opportunity

Some opportunities come through direct conversations with people in your target market.

This does not mean sending cold messages to CEOs asking for a job. That approach usually feels clumsy and can damage your credibility.

Direct conversations should be thoughtful, relevant and low-pressure.

You may reach out to someone because you share a connection, have worked in the same sector, genuinely value their perspective, or are interested in the business problems their organisation is facing. The purpose is not to force an immediate outcome. The purpose is to create a conversation that may lead to insight, an introduction, a referral, or a future opportunity.

For example, a senior finance leader interested in private equity-backed businesses may speak with CFOs, investors, advisers or recruiters who work in that space. A transformation leader may connect with executives who have led similar programs. A general manager may reconnect with former clients, suppliers or leaders in sectors where their experience is relevant.

The tone matters.

Good outreach is clear and respectful. It does not oversell. It does not pressure. It does not ask too much too early.

A simple message might say:

"I noticed your work across privately owned growth businesses and thought it would be useful to connect. My background is in senior finance leadership, with a focus on improving financial control, reporting quality and commercial decision support in complex environments."

That message is not a job application. It creates context.

Over time, context creates opportunity.

Make it easy for people to introduce you

When someone offers to introduce you, do not make them write your story from scratch.

Give them a short introduction they can use or adapt. This helps them help you.

For example:

"Belinda, as discussed, I thought it would be useful to introduce you to Sarah. Sarah is a senior finance leader with deep experience across financial control, reporting improvement, governance and executive decision support. She is currently exploring CFO and Head of Finance opportunities in complex private and mid-market organisations."

That is easy to send. It is clear, professional and specific.

If you leave the introduction to chance, the person may write something too vague.

For example:

"Sarah is looking for a new role, and I thought you might be able to help."

That does not give the recipient enough context.

Senior referrals need clarity because people are busy. If the introduction clearly explains who you are and why the conversation is relevant, the recipient is more likely to respond properly.

Your referral message should not sound desperate

Many senior professionals hesitate to reach out to their network for fear of appearing needy.

That concern is reasonable, but it usually comes from the wrong framing. You are not asking people to rescue you. You are updating your trusted contacts and making it easier for them to connect you with relevant opportunities.

The tone should be confident, not apologetic.

Instead of:

"I hope you do not mind me reaching out. I am looking for a new role and would really appreciate anything you can do to help."

A stronger version would be:

"I wanted to let you know I am starting to explore senior finance leadership opportunities, particularly roles where I can improve financial control, reporting quality and executive decision support. Given your knowledge of the market, I would value any insight or introductions that may be relevant."

That message is clear, composed and respectful.

It does not sound desperate. It sounds considered.

The way you speak about your search affects how people perceive you. If you sound uncertain, they may become uncertain. If you sound clear, they are more likely to trust your direction.

Build a small group of market advocates

You do not need hundreds of people actively helping your search.

You need a smaller group of relevant people who understand your value and are willing to advocate for you when appropriate.

These may include former managers, senior colleagues, recruiters, clients, board contacts, advisers, mentors or industry peers. The key is that they know enough about your work to speak about you credibly.

A good market advocate can do several things.

They can introduce you to relevant people.

They can alert you to roles before they are public.

They can validate your reputation.

They can give you market insight.

They can explain how your experience may be viewed.

They can help you understand what decision makers are currently looking for.

These people should not be treated transactionally. The relationship matters. Stay in touch when you are not looking. Share useful information. Thank them properly. Follow up after introductions. Let them know outcomes where appropriate.

Senior careers are built through relationships over time, not just when you need something.

Track conversations properly

A referral and search strategy needs to be tracked.

Without tracking, it is easy to lose momentum. You forget who you contacted, who replied, who offered to introduce you, who asked for your resume, who suggested a follow-up, and who needs an update.

You do not need a complicated system. A simple spreadsheet or notes document is enough.

Track the person's name, organisation, relationship, reason for contact, date contacted, response, next step and follow-up date.

This helps you stay professional.

It also helps you avoid two common mistakes: following up too often or not following up at all.

Many opportunities do not appear immediately. A conversation today may become useful in two months. A recruiter may not have a role now, but may remember you later. A former colleague may hear of something after a board meeting next quarter. A senior contact may introduce you when timing changes.

Tracking helps you stay visible without becoming pushy.

Use LinkedIn to support relationship building

LinkedIn can support your referral strategy, but it should not replace real conversation.

The platform allows you to stay visible, reconnect with former contacts, comment on relevant updates, share professional insight and remind your network what you are known for. This can be useful, especially when done with intent.

If you are targeting senior finance roles, engage with content on finance leadership, governance, business performance, economic conditions, board reporting, transformation, and commercial decision-making. If you are targeting operations roles, engage with content on performance, people leadership, customer outcomes, change, and service delivery.

This does not mean you need to post constantly. It means your activity should support your positioning.

If someone checks your profile after a conversation, your LinkedIn presence should make sense. It should reinforce the same message you convey in your outreach, resume, and conversations with recruiters.

Consistency builds trust.

Common mistakes in referral strategy

There are several mistakes that weaken senior referral strategies.

The first is waiting too long to activate the network. Many people wait until they are desperate, redundant or completely frustrated before speaking to anyone. That creates pressure and can affect the tone of the conversation.

The second is being too vague. If people do not know what you want, they cannot help you properly.

The third is asking for jobs rather than for conversations. Most people do not have a job ready for you. They may have insight, introductions or market knowledge, which can be just as valuable.

The fourth is contacting people only when you need something. Relationships work better when there is some history, respect and ongoing contact.

The fifth is failing to follow up. If someone makes an introduction or gives advice, acknowledge it. Let them know what happened. Thank them.

The sixth is overexplaining. Senior contacts do not need your life story in the first message. They need enough context to understand why you are reaching out.

The seventh is relying on one or two recruiters rather than building a broader market-access strategy.

The eighth is assuming that a quiet response means rejection. Sometimes people are busy. Sometimes, timing is not right. Sometimes the value of the conversation appears later.

A good strategy is steady, not frantic.

How to reconnect with people properly

Reconnecting can feel awkward, especially if you have not spoken to someone for years. The best approach is to be direct, respectful and clear.

You do not need to pretend the gap does not exist. You also do not need to overapologise for it.

A simple message might say:

"I know it has been a while since we last spoke, but I have followed your work with interest and thought it would be good to reconnect. I am currently exploring senior finance leadership opportunities and would value your view on the market when you have time."

That is enough.

If the person responds, keep the conversation focused. Ask for insight, not favours. Be clear about your direction. Listen carefully. If they offer to introduce you to someone, make it easy by giving them a short summary they can pass on.

The aim is to create a professional conversation, not to make the other person feel responsible for your search.

Chapter Reflection

Before moving to the next chapter, review your referral and search strategy honestly.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Do people in my network know what role I am targeting?
- [ ] Can they explain my value clearly to someone else?
- [ ] Have I reconnected with former colleagues who know my work?
- [ ] Have I identified recruiters who operate in my target market?
- [ ] Does my LinkedIn profile support the message I am giving people?
- [ ] Am I asking for vague help, or giving people a clear brief?
- [ ] Do I have a list of relevant contacts and follow-ups?
- [ ] Am I building conversations before I need them urgently?
- [ ] Am I making it easy for people to refer me?

If the answer to these questions is no, your search may be too passive.

Practical Exercise

Build Your Referral Map

Create a referral map with five categories.

1. People who know my work well.
2. People connected to my target organisations.
3. Recruiters and search consultants in my market.
4. Senior contacts who can provide market insight.
5. People who may know decision makers.

Under each category, write 10 names.

Then choose five people to contact this week. Do not choose randomly. Choose people where there is a clear reason to reconnect.

For each person, write:

Why is this person relevant?

What do they know about my work?

What do I want them to understand about my next move?

What can I ask for without overreaching?

What follow-up may be useful?

Then draft a short message that gives them a clear brief.

For example:

"I wanted to let you know I am starting to explore senior finance leadership roles where I can help complex organisations improve financial control, reporting quality and executive decision support. Given your knowledge of the market, I would value your perspective on where this type of experience may be most relevant."

This is simple, clear and easy to respond to.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A senior job search is not only about applications.

It is about search visibility, recruiter relationships, trusted referrals and relevant conversations.

People cannot refer you if they do not understand you. Recruiters cannot place you if they cannot see where you fit. Your network cannot help properly if your message is too broad.

The stronger your referral and search strategy, the easier it becomes for the right people to think of you, speak about you and connect you to better opportunities.

CHAPTER 8

Interview Like a Senior Commercial Leader

Senior interviews are not about repeating your resume. They are about proving judgement, impact and trust.

CHAPTER 8

Interview Like a Senior Commercial Leader

A senior interview is not just a test of whether you can do the job.

It is a test of judgement, credibility, influence, self-awareness and commercial thinking. By the time you reach the interview stage, the organisation usually believes there is some level of fit. They have seen your resume, reviewed your LinkedIn profile, spoken with you or received a recommendation from a recruiter or contact. The interview is where they test whether the value on paper holds up in conversation.

This is where many capable professionals lose ground.

They prepare for an interview as if they are about to be examined on their career history. They memorise examples, rehearse answers and try to cover everything they have done. While preparation matters, senior interviews require more than prepared stories. They require you to think clearly, speak with substance and connect your experience to the problems the organisation is trying to solve.

At the senior level, the interviewer is not only asking, "Can this person do the work?"

They are also asking, "Can I trust this person with complexity, people, risk, decisions, money and reputation?"

That is a different standard.

Senior interviews are not just competency interviews

Many professionals prepare for interviews by reviewing common questions.

Tell me about yourself. What are your strengths? Why are you interested in this role? Tell me about a time you led change. How do you manage stakeholders? What is your leadership style? Why should we hire you?

These questions still appear, but the real assessment sits underneath them.

When you are asked about change, the interviewer is not only listening for a project example. They are listening to how you handle resistance, ambiguity, politics, competing priorities and accountability.

When you are asked about leadership, they are not only asking whether you manage people. They want to understand how you lift performance, make decisions, handle conflict, develop capability and build trust.

When you are asked about commercial impact, they are not simply looking for a number. They want to see whether you understand how your work connects to revenue, cost, risk, growth, margin, governance, productivity, customer outcomes or business confidence.

This is why senior interview preparation must go beyond rehearsing answers.

You need to understand what the interviewer is really testing.

Start with the business problem

Before any senior interview, you need to ask yourself one question.

What problem is this organisation trying to solve by hiring this role?

Do not stop at the job title. A title only tells you part of the story. A CFO role could focus on growth, control, funding, turnaround, board reporting, M&A, cash flow, governance, or investor confidence. A General Manager role could focus on performance, people, operations, customer outcomes, commercial discipline, or a cultural reset. A transformation role could focus on delivery discipline, adoption, risk, systems, cost, governance, or stakeholder alignment.

The more you understand the business problem, the stronger your interview will be.

This is where many candidates stay too shallow. They read the position description, review the company website, and prepare examples that match the listed responsibilities. That is useful, but it is not enough. You need to think about why the role exists now, what may have changed inside the organisation and what risk the hiring panel is trying to reduce.

For example, if a business is growing quickly, it may need someone who can bring structure without slowing momentum. If a finance function has lost trust, they may need someone who can improve control, accuracy and confidence. If a transformation program is behind schedule, they may need someone who can bring governance, stakeholder alignment and delivery discipline. If a team is underperforming, they may need someone who can reset expectations and rebuild accountability.

Your interview answers should connect to that context.

The goal is not to recite your career. The goal is to show why your experience is relevant to the problem they face.

Your opening answer sets the frame

The question "Tell me about yourself" is often treated as an icebreaker. It is not.

At the senior level, this answer sets the frame for the whole conversation. It tells the panel how to understand you. It should not be a walk-through of every role you have held, nor should it become a long personal history.

A strong opening answer should connect your background, value and relevance to the role.

For example, a senior finance leader might say:

"I am a senior finance leader with experience across financial control, reporting, governance and commercial decision support in complex organisations. Much of my work has focused on improving visibility, strengthening controls, and providing executive teams with better information to make decisions. What interests me about this role is the opportunity to bring that mix of control, commercial thinking and leadership to a business that is clearly looking to improve performance and decision quality."

That answer gives the panel a clear lens. It shows function, value and relevance. It does not try to cover everything.

A weaker answer would start at the beginning of the career and walk through every role in sequence. That may be accurate, but it can quickly lose the room. Senior interviewers are looking for judgement. Part of that judgement is knowing what matters and what can be left out.

Speak to value, not activity

The same problem that appears in resumes often appears in interviews.

Candidates describe what they did, but not why it mattered.

They say they managed reporting, led a team, worked with stakeholders, delivered projects, supported change or improved processes. Those statements may be true, but they are not always strong enough. The interviewer needs to understand the value of the work.

A stronger answer connects activity to business outcome.

Instead of saying:

"I managed the monthly reporting process and worked with stakeholders across the business."

You might say:

"I led the monthly reporting process during a period where the executive team needed clearer visibility over cost, revenue and operating performance. The issue was not only producing reports on time. It was making sure the information was accurate, useful and decision-ready. I worked with finance and operational leaders to improve the quality of commentary, reduce rework and give the executive team a clearer view of what was driving performance."

That answer shows more than a task. It shows context, purpose, judgement, and value.

This is the shift senior candidates need to make.

Your answers should not sound like a list of duties. They should show how you think, what you noticed, what you improved and what the business gained.

The best answers have a clear structure

Senior interviews do not require scripted answers, but they do require structure.

Without structure, strong candidates can ramble. They give too much background, cover too many examples, include irrelevant details, and then run out of time before reaching the point. This can make a capable person sound unclear.

A simple structure helps.

You can use this flow:

Context: What was happening?

Problem: What needed to change?

Action: What did you do?

Judgement: Why did you make that decision?

Result: What changed?

Learning: What did that teach you, or how would you apply it again?

This structure is stronger than a basic STAR response because it includes judgement and learning. At the senior level, the panel wants to understand not only what you did, but how you thought about the situation.

For example, if asked about leading change, do not simply describe the project plan. Explain the business context, the resistance, the risk, the stakeholders involved, the trade-offs you considered, the decision you made and the outcome. Show how you balanced delivery with people, risk and commercial impact.

That is what makes an answer senior.

Avoid sounding too technical

Technical expertise matters, especially in functions such as finance, risk, technology, legal, operations and transformation. However, technical depth alone is rarely enough at the senior level.

If your answers stay too technical, you may sound like a specialist rather than a leader.

This is a common issue for people who have worked their way up through technical roles. They are often highly capable, but in interviews, they overexplain the technical details because that is where they feel most confident. The problem is that the panel may be assessing something broader.

They want to know whether you can influence people who do not share your technical background. They want to know whether you can translate detail into decisions. They want to know whether you can lead, challenge, simplify, prioritise and communicate with senior stakeholders.

This does not mean you should hide your technical depth. It means you should place it in a commercial frame.

For example, instead of explaining every step of a reporting improvement, explain what was wrong with the reporting, why it mattered, how it affected decisions, what you changed and what improved as a result.

Technical details should support the answer.

It should not become the answer.

Show commercial judgement

Commercial judgement is one of the strongest signals in a senior interview.

It shows that you understand how decisions affect the business beyond your own function. It also shows that you can balance competing priorities rather than simply execute tasks.

Commercial judgement may appear in many ways.

It may be the decision to delay a project because the risk was too high. It may be the ability to challenge a cost assumption. It may be knowing when to escalate an issue. It may be that you chose not to pursue a growth opportunity because the margin or risk profile was wrong. It may be improving reporting so leaders can make better decisions. It may be managing a difficult stakeholder without damaging trust. It may be protecting governance when the business was under pressure to move quickly.

When preparing for senior interviews, identify examples where your judgement mattered.

Do not only prepare examples where everything went perfectly. Senior panels often want to know how you handle complexity, tension and imperfect information. They want to see whether you can make sound decisions when the answer is not obvious.

A strong answer might include the trade-offs you considered. It might explain what you chose not to do and why. It might show how you balanced cost, risk, people and timing.

That is often more impressive than a polished success story with no complexity.

CLIENT EXAMPLE

A senior finance candidate came to me after several interviews that had gone well on the surface but had not resulted in offers.

She was experienced, technically strong and credible. She had led reporting, budgeting, audit, controls and stakeholder engagement across complex environments. The issue was not her capability. The issue was that her interview answers were too operational.

When asked about her experience, she gave accurate but task-heavy answers. She explained the reporting cycle, the audit process, the budgeting timetable and the stakeholders involved. What she did not explain clearly enough was the commercial value of her work.

We worked on shifting her answers from process to impact.

Instead of focusing solely on producing reports, she learned to explain how she improved reporting quality, enabling executives to make better decisions. Instead of talking only about audit preparation, she explained how she reduced risk, strengthened documentation and improved confidence in the control environment. Instead of talking only about stakeholder engagement, she explained how she influenced senior leaders, challenged assumptions and supported better business planning.

The content of her experience did not change.

The way she communicated it did.

In her next interview, she came across as more senior because she no longer had to explain tasks. She was explaining value, judgement, and business impact.

That is the difference.

Prepare proof, not scripts

Preparation is essential, but over-scripting can work against you.

A senior interview should feel like a considered business conversation, not a memorised performance. If every answer sounds rehearsed, the panel may question how you think when you are not prepared. If you rely too heavily on scripts, you may struggle when the question is asked in a different way.

A better approach is to prepare proof points.

Identify six to eight strong examples that show your value across different areas. These may include leadership, change, performance improvement, stakeholder influence, commercial decision-making, risk management, governance, team development, conflict, failure, resilience, or growth.

For each example, know the context, problem, actions, decisions, result and learning. Do not memorise word for word. Understand the story well enough to adjust it to different questions.

One example may answer several questions.

A finance transformation example might demonstrate change leadership, stakeholder influence, reporting improvements, governance, technology adoption, resistance management, and commercial impact. A team turnaround example might show leadership, accountability, culture, performance, conflict and communication.

The skill is not memorising more examples.

The skill is knowing which example to use and how to frame it for the question being asked.

Ask better questions

The questions you ask in a senior interview matter.

They show how you think. They also help you assess whether the role is right for you.

Weak questions tend to focus too early on benefits, flexibility, process or things that could easily be found online. There is nothing wrong with asking practical questions, but in a senior interview, you also need to ask questions that show commercial interest and judgement.

For example:

"What are the biggest priorities this role needs to address in the first six to twelve months?"

"What has made this role critical now?"

"What would success look like after the first year?"

"What are the main risks or constraints the person stepping into this role would need to understand?"

"How does this role work with the executive team or board?"

"What are the current pressure points across the function or business?"

"What needs to change, and what needs to be protected?"

These questions help you understand the real role behind the job description. They also signal that you are thinking beyond tasks and title.

At the senior level, you are assessing them as much as they are assessing you. A good interview should give both sides better information.

Handle salary and package questions carefully

Salary may come up early, especially through recruiters. You need to be prepared.

The mistake many people make is either avoiding the conversation completely or giving a number without context. At the senior level, the package can include base salary, bonus, incentives, equity, benefits, flexibility, car allowance, superannuation, leave, travel expectations and other conditions.

If asked about expectations, you can give a range, but it should be informed by the market, the role size, your level and the total package structure.

You might say:

"Based on the level of role, scope and market, I would expect the package to sit around X to Y, depending on the total structure, bonus and broader conditions. I would want to understand the role in more detail before landing on a final number."

This keeps the conversation professional. It shows that you understand value, but you are not locking yourself into a number before you understand the full role.

The full negotiation will come later, once there is a clear interest. But you should be ready to discuss salary without sounding uncomfortable or unsure.

Address gaps or concerns directly

If there is an obvious concern in your background, do not pretend it does not exist.

Maybe you have been in one organisation for a long time. Maybe you are changing sectors. Maybe you have had a short role. Maybe you have been made redundant. Maybe your title does not fully reflect your level. Maybe you are stepping up. Maybe you have taken time out.

The key is to address the issue calmly and reframe it in terms of value.

For example, if you have been in one organisation for a long time, the risk in the panel's mind may be a lack of adaptability. You can address that by showing the range of change, stakeholders, projects, business cycles and leadership challenges you handled inside that organisation.

If you are changing sectors, the risk may be a lack of industry knowledge. You can address that by showing the business problems that transfer, such as governance, cost control, reporting quality, people leadership, transformation, risk, or commercial decision-making.

If you are stepping up, the risk may be whether you can operate at the next level. You can address that by showing where you have already operated beyond your title, influenced senior leaders, or held accountability similar to that of the role you want.

The goal is not to be defensive.

The goal is to show that you understand the concern and have evidence to answer it.

Do not confuse confidence with performance

Some people believe they need to demonstrate confidence in an interview.

They try to sound polished, impressive and certain. But senior interviewers are often more interested in substance than polish. They want to see how you think, how self-aware you are and whether they can trust you.

Real confidence is not about having a perfect answer to every question.

It is the ability to pause, think, and respond clearly. It is being able to say, "That is a good question. I would think about it in a few parts." It is being able to discuss mistakes or challenges without falling apart. It is being able to explain your value without sounding inflated.

Senior people do not need to sound perfect.

They need to sound credible.

A credible answer has substance, context and evidence. It acknowledges complexity. It does not pretend that every situation was simple or that every outcome was easy. It shows judgement.

That is far stronger than a polished but shallow answer.

Common senior interview mistakes

There are several common mistakes that weaken senior interviews.

The first is providing a career history rather than a clear value summary.

The second is answering too technically and failing to show commercial impact.

The third is using examples that are too old or too small for the role.

The fourth is talking too much and losing the point.

The fifth is not linking answers back to the role or business problem.

The sixth is failing to show enough judgement, trade-offs or decision-making.

The seventh is underselling because you do not want to sound arrogant.

The eighth is not preparing for concerns about gaps, sector changes or level changes.

The ninth is asking weak questions that do not reveal the real role.

The tenth is leaving the panel unclear about why you are the right fit.

Most of these mistakes are not capability problems. There are communication problems.

And communication problems can be fixed.

After the interview

Follow-up still matters, but it should be professional and useful.

A thank-you note does not need to be long. It should acknowledge the conversation, reinforce your interest and briefly connect your value to the role.

For example:

"Thank you for the conversation today. I appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the role and the priorities around financial control, reporting quality and executive decision support. The discussion reinforced my interest, particularly given my experience improving reporting discipline, strengthening governance and supporting senior leaders with clearer commercial insight."

That is stronger than a generic thank-you message because it reinforces relevance.

If there was a point you wanted to clarify or a useful example you did not get to share, you can mention it briefly. Do not use the follow-up to re-answer the entire interview. Keep it focused.

Chapter Reflection

Before your next senior interview, ask yourself:

- [ ] Do I understand the business problem the role addresses?
- [ ] Can I explain my value clearly in the first few minutes?
- [ ] Do my examples show level, scope and impact?
- [ ] Am I speaking about commercial value, not just activity?
- [ ] Can I explain the judgement behind my decisions?
- [ ] Have I prepared examples that show leadership, influence, risk and outcomes?
- [ ] Can I address gaps or concerns without sounding defensive?
- [ ] Do my questions show senior thinking?
- [ ] Can I explain why this role makes sense as my next move?

If you cannot answer these questions, you may be preparing at the wrong level.

Practical Exercise

Build Your Senior Interview Proof Bank

Create a proof bank with eight examples from your career.

Choose examples that show:

Leadership.

Commercial impact.

Stakeholder influence.

Change or transformation.

Risk or governance.

Team development.

Conflict or challenge.

A mistake, setback or difficult lesson.

For each example, write:

What was happening?

What was the real problem?

What was at stake?

Who was involved?

What did I do?

What judgement did I apply?

What changed as a result?

What did I learn?

How does this example connect to the roles I want next?

This exercise helps you move away from scripted answers and towards stronger evidence. It also gives you a base of examples you can use across different questions.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A senior interview is not about proving you have been busy.

It is about proving you can think, lead, influence, and deliver value at the required level.

The strongest candidates do not simply describe their experience. They connect that experience to the business problem, explain their judgement, and show the impact of their work.

At the senior level, your answers need to do more than sound competent.

They need to build trust.

CHAPTER 9

Handle Setbacks Without Losing Confidence

A slow search does not mean you lack value. It means you need to assess where the process is breaking down.

CHAPTER 9

Handle Setbacks Without Losing Confidence

Rejection feels different at the executive level.

When you are earlier in your career, rejection is often easier to explain. You may not have enough experience yet. You may be competing against people with stronger technical skills. You may still be building your track record.

At the senior level, it can feel more personal.

You have spent years building your career. You have led teams, solved problems, carried responsibility, supported senior leaders and delivered outcomes. You know you are capable. So when the market does not respond, when recruiters go quiet, when applications disappear into silence or when you reach the final stage and still do not secure the role, it can shake your confidence quickly.

This is one of the hardest parts of a senior job search.

The silence can feel like judgement.

The rejection can feel like proof.

The waiting can make you question your value.

But a slow or difficult search does not always mean you are not good enough. It often means there is something in the process, positioning, timing, role fit or market access that needs to be understood more clearly.

That distinction matters because the way you interpret setbacks will affect the way you respond to them.

If you take every rejection as a personal verdict, you are more likely to shrink, lower your expectations, apply for roles below your level or present yourself with less confidence. If you treat setbacks as information, you can make better decisions. You can review what is happening, identify the pattern, and adjust the parts of the process within your control.

A senior job search requires resilience, but not blind positivity. You do not need to pretend rejection feels fine. It often does not. You do need a way to separate emotion from evidence so you can keep making clear decisions.

Silence is not always rejection

One of the most frustrating parts of the job search process is silence.

You apply for a role and hear nothing. A recruiter says they will come back to you, then disappears. An interview seems to go well, but the process stalls. A company tells you they are still deciding, but weeks pass without movement.

It is easy to fill that silence with negative assumptions.

They did not like me.

I am too expensive.

I am too old.

My experience is not strong enough.

The market does not want someone like me.

Sometimes there may be a real issue to address, but silence does not always mean rejection. It can mean the organisation has paused the role. It can mean budgets have changed. It can mean an internal candidate has appeared. It can mean the hiring manager is travelling. It can mean the recruiter is waiting for feedback. It can mean the process is poorly managed. It can mean the brief has changed.

None of that makes the silence less frustrating, but it does mean you should be careful about the story you attach to it.

You need to look for patterns, not single events.

One unanswered application tells you very little.

Ten unanswered applications for roles that should be aligned may tell you something important about your resume, LinkedIn profile, target role or application route.

One interview that does not convert may be a role fit.

Several interviews that stall after the same point may suggest your interview story needs work.

One recruiter going quiet may be normal.

If every recruiter is unclear about where to place you, it may mean your positioning is too broad.

The skill is to assess the evidence without turning every setback into a statement about your worth.

Separate capability from positioning

One of the biggest mistakes senior professionals make is assuming that poor market response means poor capability.

That is not always true.

Capability is what you can do.

Positioning is what the market can see.

Those are not the same thing.

You may have strong leadership ability, but your resume may be too operational. You may have excellent commercial judgement, but your interview answers may be too technical. You may be ready for a larger role, but your LinkedIn profile may still position you at your current level. You may have broad experience, but your message may be too unclear for recruiters to place you confidently.

When setbacks happen, do not start by asking, "What is wrong with me?"

Start by asking, "Where is the process breaking down?"

If you are applying for roles and not getting interviews, the issue may be your resume, LinkedIn profile, target role selection or lack of referral support.

If you are having recruiter screening calls but not progressing, the issue may be how clearly you explain your direction, salary expectations, fit or senior value.

If you are getting first interviews but not second interviews, the issue may be that your answers are too broad, too technical, too operational, or not strongly enough connected to the business problem.

If you are reaching the final stage but missing out, the issue may be competition, cultural fit, perceived risk, sector preference, internal politics or a stronger candidate with more direct evidence.

Each stage tells you something different.

The aim is to accurately diagnose the problem.

Use the stage of rejection as data

A useful way to assess setbacks is to examine where they are occurring.

If you are not getting interviews, your first issue is probably visibility or positioning. The market may not see enough relevance in your resume, LinkedIn profile, or application. You may be applying for roles where your evidence is not strong enough, or you may be relying too heavily on cold applications when the role needs a warmer route in.

If you are getting recruiter calls but not being put forward, your issue may be a lack of clarity. You may not be explaining your value clearly enough. You may be too broad in your target. Your salary expectations may not match the roles being discussed. The recruiter may not understand where you fit.

If you are being put forward but not interviewed by the client, your resume may not be carrying the case strongly enough. The recruiter may like you, but the document may not make the hiring manager confident.

If you are getting interviews but no offers, the issue may be how you are communicating your value. You may be giving too much detail, not enough business context, weak examples or answers that do not show the level of judgement required.

If you reach the final stage but lose out, the issue may be more nuanced. At that point, you are usually credible. The decision may come down to sector fit, leadership style, stakeholder chemistry, salary, perceived risk, internal preference, or another candidate who offers a closer match.

This is why feedback matters, even when it is incomplete.

You may not always receive honest feedback. Many organisations give vague answers. Some recruiters soften the message. Some processes provide no feedback at all. Even so, you can still look for patterns across the search.

Patterns are more useful than isolated disappointments.

CLIENT EXAMPLE

A senior candidate came to me after three final-stage interviews that had not converted into offers.

By the time we spoke, her confidence had taken a hit. She had started to believe that something was wrong with her. On paper, she had strong experience. She was getting interviews, which meant the market saw enough relevance to meet her. But after several near misses, she was starting to question whether she was as strong as she thought.

When we reviewed the interview process, a pattern appeared.

She was very good at explaining what she had done, but less strong at explaining why it mattered. Her answers were detailed, but overly focused on process. She would explain the project, the stakeholders, the meetings, and the activity, but she was not always clearly landing the commercial point.

For the level she was targeting, the panel needed to hear more about judgement, influence, risk, trade-offs and business outcomes.

We reworked her examples so each one had a clearer link to the business problem. Instead of talking about managing reporting, she spoke about improving decision quality. Instead of talking about working with stakeholders, she spoke about influencing senior leaders through conflicting priorities. Instead of talking about managing change, she spoke about reducing risk, bringing structure and improving adoption.

The experience had not changed.

The way she communicated it had.

That shift helped her rebuild confidence because she could see the issue more clearly. She was not failing because she lacked value. She was losing ground because the value was not being communicated at the right level.

That is an important difference.

Do not lower your standards too quickly

A difficult market can make even strong professionals panic.

After enough silence, it is tempting to lower your salary expectations, apply for roles below your level, accept poor conditions or convince yourself that any role is better than waiting.

Sometimes, compromise is necessary. Bills need to be paid. Life is real. Not every career decision can be made from an ideal position.

But there is a difference between making a practical decision and making a fear-based decision.

Before you lower your expectations, check whether you have properly tested your positioning, resume, LinkedIn profile, recruiter approach and referral strategy. If those are weak, lowering your standards may not solve the real problem. You may simply end up competing for roles that are too junior, where employers see you as overqualified or not fully committed.

This can create another problem. The market may question why you are applying at a level below your own. Recruiters may hesitate because they assume you will leave quickly. Hiring managers may worry that the role will not hold your interest. You may secure a role, but feel frustrated within months.

This does not mean you should never take a lower-level role. Sometimes it makes sense, especially during a transition, a sector change, or a personal reset. But it should be a conscious decision, not a panic response.

Ask yourself:

Am I adjusting because the evidence supports it, or because I am anxious?

Have I fixed the positioning problem first?

Is this role genuinely aligned, or am I reacting to fear?

Will this move help my longer-term direction, or will it create another issue?

Senior career decisions need a clear head, especially when confidence is low.

Rejection does not mean the role was right

One reason rejection hurts is that people often become attached to a role during the process.

They start to imagine the title, the salary, the office, the lifestyle change, the relief, the validation and the feeling of finally moving forward. By the time the rejection comes, it can feel like losing something they already owned.

But an interview process only shows you part of the role.

You may not know the full politics. You may not know the board dynamics. You may not know the real reason the last person left. You may not know whether the budget exists, whether the expectations are reasonable or whether the culture is healthy. You may not know whether the hiring manager is clear, supportive or difficult.

Not getting a role is disappointing, but it does not always mean you lost the right role.

Sometimes rejection protects you from a poor fit.

Sometimes the role was not as strong as it looked.

Sometimes the organisation wanted someone different for reasons that have nothing to do with your value.

Sometimes the process exposed that the role was not aligned with your non-negotiables.

This does not remove the sting, but it can help you hold the outcome more lightly.

A role has to be right both ways.

They are assessing you.

You are also assessing them.

Ask for feedback, but do not depend on it

Feedback can be useful, but it is not always available or reliable.

Some feedback is clear and helpful. A recruiter may tell you that another candidate had stronger sector experience, more recent transformation exposure or deeper board reporting experience. That type of feedback can help you assess whether there is a genuine gap.

Some feedback is vague. You may hear that another candidate was a "better fit," had "stronger alignment", or was "closer to the brief." That may be true, but it does not always tell you what to change.

Some feedback is softened to avoid discomfort. Some is filtered through legal or human resources concerns. Some is based on chemistry, preference, or internal politics that will never be properly explained.

This means feedback should be considered, but not treated as the absolute truth.

If you receive feedback, look at it carefully. Does it match other feedback? Does it show a real gap? Is it something you can address? Does it suggest a positioning issue, an interview issue, or a role fit issue?

If the feedback is vague, ask a better question.

Instead of asking, "Do you have any feedback?" ask:

"Was there anything in my background or interview that made the panel less confident about my fit for the role?"

Or:

"Was the decision mainly based on sector experience, leadership style, technical depth or another factor?"

Or:

"Is there anything you would suggest I strengthen before a similar process?"

These questions may not always produce a clear answer, but they increase the chance of useful feedback.

Protect your confidence with structure

A job search without structure can quickly affect confidence.

When every day becomes a mix of checking job boards, waiting for responses, rewriting documents and refreshing email, the process can feel consuming. The less control you feel, the more your confidence can drop.

This is why structure matters.

A weekly search rhythm helps separate activity from anxiety. It gives you a plan to follow rather than leaving you to react to whatever appears online.

A simple weekly rhythm might include:

Reviewing aligned roles.

Contacting selected recruiters.

Reconnecting with relevant people in your network.

Following up on previous conversations.

Improving one part of your resume or LinkedIn profile.

Preparing interview examples.

Tracking applications, recruiter calls and responses.

Reading market updates in your sector.

Take time away from the search so it does not consume every part of your life.

The aim is not to fill every hour with job search activity. That can become counterproductive. The aim is to create a steady process that keeps you moving without letting the search take over your identity.

Your career is important.

But you are not your job search.

Watch for the confidence spiral

A confidence spiral usually starts quietly.

You do not hear back from a few roles. You start checking your email more often. You apply for roles that are less aligned. You rewrite your resume again. You compare yourself to people on LinkedIn. You start assuming everyone else is moving faster. You become less clear in conversations. You start sounding more apologetic. You lower your expectations without proper evidence.

This spiral is common, but it is not useful.

When you notice it, pause and return to the evidence.

What is actually happening?

How many aligned roles have I applied for?

How many were supported by referrals?

How many recruiter conversations have I had?

Where am I dropping out of the process?

Is my resume proving value?

Is my LinkedIn profile aligned with my target?

Am I speaking clearly about my level and impact?

Have I received any real feedback, or am I filling silence with assumptions?

This helps you move from emotion back to assessment.

You do not need to ignore how you feel. You simply need to avoid letting fear make decisions for you.

Know when to adjust and when to keep going

Not every setback requires a major change.

This is important.

Many professionals change direction too quickly. They apply for a few roles, hear nothing, and assume they need a completely different resume, a different target, a different salary, a different sector or a different level.

Sometimes change is needed, but too much adjustment can weaken your search. If you keep shifting your message, you send an inconsistent signal to the market.

Before making major changes, assess the quality and quantity of the evidence.

If you have applied for three roles and heard nothing, that may not be enough data.

If you have applied for 20 highly aligned roles with no response, the resume, LinkedIn profile, or route-to-market needs a review.

If you have had several recruiter calls but no progress, your positioning or target may need to be tightened.

If you have had multiple interviews but no offer, your interview examples, commercial framing or role fit may need work.

If you keep reaching the final stage, you may not need a full reset. You may need a sharper closing message, stronger risk handling or better assessment of which roles are truly aligned.

The goal is to adjust based on evidence, not fear.

Keep your identity bigger than the process

A senior job search can become consuming because it touches identity.

You are not only looking for work. You may also be dealing with status, income, family expectations, self-worth, ambition, disappointment and the fear of being left behind.

This is why rejection can feel so heavy.

But the market is not a complete measure of your value. It is a process shaped by timing, economics, relationships, budgets, hiring preferences, risk appetite, search methods, and human decision-making.

You still need to take the process seriously.

You still need to improve weak areas.

You still need to listen to feedback.

But you also need to keep perspective.

A slow search does not erase your career. One rejection does not cancel your achievements. A poor process does not define your future value. A missed role does not mean the right role is gone.

Confidence is not built by pretending everything is fine. It is built by staying honest, steady and clear while you keep doing the right work.

Chapter Reflection

Before moving to the next chapter, review your recent search activity and look for patterns.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Where am I dropping out of the process?
- [ ] Am I getting interviews for the roles I apply for?
- [ ] Are recruiter conversations progressing?
- [ ] Am I being considered for roles at the right level?
- [ ] Am I communicating my value clearly in interviews?
- [ ] Am I receiving similar feedback more than once?
- [ ] Am I applying for aligned roles, or reacting to anxiety?
- [ ] Am I lowering my standards too quickly?
- [ ] Am I confusing silence with proof that I am not good enough?
- [ ] Am I making changes based on evidence or emotion?

These questions will help you assess the search more clearly.

Practical Exercise

Diagnose the Setback

Choose one recent setback and write down the facts only.

Role title:

Organisation:

How I found the role:

Was there a referral or warm contact?

Was my resume aligned?

Was my LinkedIn profile aligned?

Did I speak with a recruiter?

Did I get an interview?

At what stage did the process stop?

What feedback did I receive?

What evidence do I have?

What assumptions am I making?

What could I improve next time?

What may have been outside my control?

This exercise helps you separate facts from fear.

Once you do that, the next step becomes clearer.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Setbacks are part of a senior job search, but they should not be treated as proof that you lack value.

Sometimes the issue is role fit. Sometimes it is timing. Sometimes it is the market. Sometimes it is positioning, visibility, route-to-market, or interview communication.

The key is to diagnose the right problem.

Do not let silence rewrite your career story.

Use the evidence, adjust what needs adjusting, and keep your value separate from the outcome of any single process.

CHAPTER 10

Negotiate the Full Package

At senior level, negotiation is about salary, scope, risk, conditions and the foundation you need to succeed.

CHAPTER 10

Negotiate the Full Package

Many senior professionals spend months trying to secure an offer, then become strangely passive the moment the offer arrives.

They have prepared for interviews, refined their resumes, improved their LinkedIn profiles, spoken with recruiters, handled setbacks, and gone through several rounds of discussion. Then, when the organisation finally says it wants them, it accepts too quickly.

Not because the offer is perfect.

Because they are relieved.

That reaction is understandable. A job search can be tiring, especially at the executive level. By the time the offer arrives, many people just want certainty. They do not want to risk the opportunity. They do not want to appear difficult. They do not want the organisation to change its mind. They tell themselves the package is "good enough" and that they can fix the rest later.

The problem is that later is often too late.

Once you have signed, your negotiating position changes. You may still be able to adjust some things, but the strongest point of negotiation is before you accept. That is the moment when the organisation has chosen you, invested time in the process and decided you are the person they want.

At the senior level, negotiation is not about being greedy. It is about ensuring the offer reflects the level of responsibility, risk, workload, value, and the conditions attached to the role.

Salary matters, but it is only one part of the conversation.

The full package matters more.

Why senior negotiation feels uncomfortable

Many people are uncomfortable negotiating because they see it as a form of conflict.

They worry that asking for more money will make them look ungrateful. They worry that raising concerns about bonuses, flexibility, reporting line, or conditions will make them seem difficult. They worry that if they push back, the offer will disappear.

These fears are common, but they are often based on a misunderstanding of the offer stage.

By the time an organisation makes an offer, they have already decided they want you. They may have interviewed several candidates, spoken with stakeholders, checked alignment, reviewed your background and compared you against the role requirements. They are not starting from neutral. They have chosen to move forward.

That does not mean you can ask for anything without consequence. Tone and judgement matter. But a professional negotiation does not damage trust when it is handled properly.

In fact, at the senior level, the ability to clearly discuss value, conditions, and expectations can strengthen trust. It shows that you understand your worth, the scope of the role, and that you take the decision seriously.

A good negotiation is not emotional.

It is commercial.

Base salary is only one part of the package

Most candidates focus first on base salary, and that is understandable. Base salary affects your income, borrowing capacity, superannuation, lifestyle, family planning and future earning base. It also becomes an anchor for future roles.

However, the full package may include far more than base salary.

It may include:

1. Base salary.
2. Superannuation.
3. Short-term bonus.
4. Long-term incentives.
5. Equity or share options.
6. Sign-on bonus.
7. Car allowance.
8. Performance review timing.
9. Flexibility and working location.
10. Leave conditions.
11. Relocation support.
12. Professional development.
13. Travel expectations.
14. Notice period.
15. Probation terms.
16. Redundancy or termination terms.
17. Title.
18. Reporting line.
19. Team structure.
20. Decision-making authority.
21. Board or executive access.
22. Budget ownership.
23. Scope of role.
24. Start date.
25. Support during the first six months.

Some of these items are financial. Others are practical. Others affect your authority, risk, workload and long-term career value.

This is why focusing only on salary can be short-sighted.

A higher base salary may not compensate for poor conditions, limited authority, unclear scope or unrealistic expectations. A slightly lower base may still be acceptable if the bonus, flexibility, equity, development path and role quality are strong.

The point is not to push on every item.

The point is to understand the whole offer before you respond.

Do not negotiate before you understand the role properly

One of the biggest mistakes candidates make is negotiating too early without fully understanding the role.

If you give a firm salary number too soon, you may anchor yourself too low before you understand the scope. If you push for conditions before understanding the organisation's constraints, you may end up focusing on the wrong things. If you accept verbally before seeing the full offer in writing, you may reduce the time you have to move.

Before negotiating, make sure you understand the role properly.

What are the first-year priorities?

What does success look like?

What is the size of the team?

What is the budget or cost base?

What decisions will you own?

Who will you report to?

How much authority will you have?

What problems are you expected to solve?

What is the current state of the function or business?

What risks are already known?

What support will be available?

Is the role replacing someone, newly created or part of a restructure?

These questions matter because the package should reflect the true size and risk of the role.

A role that looks straightforward in the job description may carry far more complexity once you understand the reality. You may be walking into broken reporting, low trust, poor systems, weak governance, team instability, board pressure, cash flow issues, cultural problems or an underperforming function.

That does not mean you should reject the role.

It means the offer needs to be assessed properly.

Your value case must be clear before you negotiate

Negotiation is much easier when your value case is clear.

If you cannot explain why you are worth the package you are asking for, the conversation becomes harder. You may still be right, but you will not sound as strong.

A value case is not a list of personal needs.

It is not:

"I need more money because my mortgage is higher."

"I was hoping for more."

"This is lower than I expected."

"I know someone else is earning more."

Those points may be real, but they are not strong negotiation arguments.

A senior value case is based on market, scope, impact and evidence.

For example:

"The scope of this role is broader than initially discussed, particularly given the board reporting, team rebuild and governance work required. Based on that level of accountability and the value I would bring through my experience in financial control, reporting improvement and executive decision support, I would be looking for a base closer to X."

That is a stronger conversation.

It links the request to the role, the scope and the value you bring.

Negotiation should not sound like a demand.

It should sound like a reasoned business discussion.

CLIENT EXAMPLE

A senior professional came to me after receiving an offer close to her expected salary but not quite aligned with the level of responsibility in the role.

At first, she was tempted to accept. She had been searching for several months and felt relieved to have an offer. The organisation was strong, the title was attractive, and the role looked like the right next step.

But when we reviewed the offer against the actual role scope, there were gaps.

The role involved a larger remit than originally described. It included a difficult reporting environment, senior stakeholder management, team leadership, governance improvement and a clear expectation that she would bring more commercial discipline into the function. There was also a bonus component, but its structure was unclear.

Rather than accepting immediately, she went back with a calm, well-reasoned response. She reinforced her interest in the role, then explained that based on the scope, expectations and value she would bring, she wanted to discuss the base salary and bonus structure before confirming.

The result was a stronger offer. Her base salary increased by $60k above her initial base salary target, with a 30% bonus attached.

That outcome was not only about money.

It changed what the role meant for her family. It gave her more security, more breathing room and a stronger sense that she was stepping into the opportunity on the right terms. It also rebuilt some of the confidence that had been worn down during the search.

The key was not aggression.

It was clarity.

She understood her value and the scope of her role, and she could discuss both professionally.

Timing matters

The best time to negotiate is after the organisation has made it clear they want you, but before you have accepted the offer.

Before that point, you can discuss expectations, but you may not have enough information or enough power in the process. After you accept, your ability to adjust the offer is weaker.

This is why you should avoid saying yes too quickly.

If an offer is made verbally, thank them and ask for the full details in writing. You can express genuine interest without accepting on the spot.

For example:

"Thank you. I am genuinely pleased to receive the offer and very interested in the role. I would like to review the full package and details in writing, then come back to you with any questions."

That response is professional. It keeps the tone positive while giving you time to assess properly.

Once you receive the written offer, review everything. Do not focus only on the salary line. Read the bonus terms, probation clause, notice period, flexibility, reporting structure, title, start date and any conditions attached to the offer.

If anything is unclear, ask.

Clarity before signature is essential.

The offer needs to match the risk

Every senior role carries some level of risk.

Some roles carry more than others.

A role in a stable, well-governed business with a clear remit, strong team and realistic expectations is different from a role in a business under pressure. A turnaround role is different from a steady state leadership role. A newly created role is different from an established one. A role with full authority is different from one in which you are accountable for outcomes but blocked from making decisions.

The package should reflect that.

If the business wants you to fix significant problems, lead difficult change, rebuild trust, carry board exposure, manage a broken function or take on a high-pressure environment, the offer needs to reflect the level of responsibility.

This does not always mean only more base salary. It may mean a sign-on bonus, a stronger short-term incentive, clearer authority, written flexibility, additional support, a review after six months, professional development, relocation assistance, or clarity on team structure.

The point is to understand what you are taking on.

Do not accept senior risk on junior terms.

Negotiation is not only about money

Sometimes the organisation cannot move on a base salary.

That may be true. Budgets may be fixed. Salary bands may be strict. Internal equity may limit movement. Public sector roles may have set ranges. Board approval may be required. The organisation may genuinely have no room to adjust the base.

That does not mean the conversation is over.

There may be other areas to discuss.

For example:

Could there be a sign-on bonus?

Could the bonus target be clarified or improved?

Could there be an earlier salary review?

Could flexibility be confirmed in writing?

Could professional development be included?

Could relocation or travel support be provided?

Could the title be adjusted to better reflect the scope?

Could the start date be moved?

Could additional leave be included?

Could there be a clearer pathway to review the package after six months?

Could support resources be confirmed?

Could the reporting line or decision rights be clarified?

In many cases, the right adjustment is not only financial. Sometimes clarity on authority, flexibility or expectations is just as important.

A role with a good salary but poor conditions can still be a poor decision.

Know what matters most before you negotiate

Before entering any negotiation, know your priorities.

Do not negotiate every item simply because you can. That can make the conversation feel scattered and weaken your position. Choose the areas that matter most.

For some people, base salary is the priority.

For others, it is flexibility.

For others, it is bonus potential, title, authority, reporting line, equity, professional development, location, start date or the ability to build a team.

You need to know what matters before the conversation begins.

Use three categories.

First, non-negotiables. These are the things you need in order to accept the role.

Second, important preferences. These are things that matter, but where you may have room to move.

Third, nice to have items. These are useful, but not essential.

This structure keeps you clear.

It also helps you avoid making emotional decisions in the moment.

Tone is everything

The way you negotiate matters as much as what you ask for.

A strong negotiation tone is calm, confident and respectful. It assumes goodwill. It keeps the relationship intact. It makes the business case without apology.

Avoid language that sounds hesitant, defensive or overly grateful.

For example:

"I am so sorry to ask, but would there be any chance of maybe increasing the salary a little?"

This weakens your position.

A stronger version would be:

"Thank you for the offer. I am very interested in the role and see strong alignment with the discussed priorities. Having reviewed the scope and expectations, I would like to discuss the base salary. Given the level of responsibility, the team leadership, the governance work required and the value I bring in this area, I would be looking for X."

That is clear and professional.

You are not apologising for discussing value.

You are also not making demands.

You are holding a business conversation.

Be ready for pushback

Not every negotiation will result in the answer you want.

The employer may say the offer is final. They may say the salary band is fixed. They may say internal equity prevents movement. They may offer a smaller increase than you asked for. They may ask you to justify your request.

This does not mean the conversation has failed.

Stay calm and ask useful questions.

For example:

"I understand. Is there any flexibility in the broader package, such as bonus structure, review timing, flexibility or professional development?"

Or:

"If the base is fixed, would the organisation be open to a salary review after six months, once agreed milestones have been met?"

Or:

"Can you help me understand how the bonus is calculated and what level of performance would be required to achieve it?"

These questions keep the conversation open.

You may not get everything you want, but you will have better information.

Do not negotiate against yourself

Some candidates weaken their position by talking too much.

They ask for a number, then explain it, then soften it, then offer to accept less before the employer has even responded. This usually comes from nerves.

For example:

"I was hoping for $230k, but I understand if that is too high, and I could maybe do $220k, or even $215k, depending on the rest of the package."

That is negotiating against yourself.

Make the point clearly, then stop.

Let the other person respond.

Silence can feel uncomfortable, but it is part of negotiation. You do not need to fill it by lowering your own request.

Watch for red flags during negotiation

The negotiation process itself can tell you a lot about the organisation.

A healthy organisation may not agree to everything, but it will usually handle the conversation professionally. It will explain constraints, answer questions and show respect.

A poor process may reveal issues.

Be cautious if the organisation becomes defensive when you ask reasonable questions. Be cautious if the offer details keep changing. Be cautious if they pressure you to accept immediately. Be cautious if they avoid giving bonus terms in writing. Be cautious if the role's scope keeps expanding while the package does not. Be cautious if they dismiss the earlier discussion of flexibility. Be cautious if the reporting line or authority is unclear.

Negotiation is not only about improving the offer.

It is also a chance to observe how the organisation handles commercial conversations.

That matters because it may reflect how they will handle issues once you are inside the role.

Know when to accept

A good negotiation does not always mean getting everything you asked for.

Sometimes the final offer is not perfect, but it is still strong enough. It may meet your core needs, support your career goals and place you in a role with the right scope, people and future value.

Before accepting, ask yourself:

Does this package reflect the role scope?

Does the base salary meet my needs?

Is the bonus clear enough?

Are the conditions acceptable?

Do I understand the expectations?

Do I trust the reporting line?

Will this role strengthen my career?

Am I accepting clarity or fear?

If the answer is positive, you can accept with confidence.

If the answer is mixed, slow down and clarify the issues.

If the answer is no, the offer may not be right, even if you worked hard to get it.

Chapter Reflection

Before accepting any senior offer, ask yourself:

- [ ] Have I reviewed the full package, not just the base salary?
- [ ] Do I understand the bonus structure?
- [ ] Does the offer reflect the true scope of the role?
- [ ] Have I clarified flexibility, reporting line and decision authority?
- [ ] Do I know what success looks like in the first year?
- [ ] Have I considered the risks associated with the role?
- [ ] Have I asked for what matters most?
- [ ] Am I accepting the role because it's right, or because I am relieved?
- [ ] Would I still want this role if I had another offer?
- [ ] Does this move support my longer-term career direction?

These questions help you move from relief to clear decision-making.

Practical Exercise

Assess the Full Offer.

Before you respond to an offer, write down the details under these headings.

Base salary:

Superannuation:

Bonus or incentive:

Equity or long-term incentive:

Sign-on bonus:

Title:

Reporting line:

Team size:

Budget or commercial scope:

Flexibility:

Location:

Travel:

Start date:

Probation:

Notice period:

Professional development:

First year expectations:

Known risks:

Support available:

Items to clarify:

Items to negotiate:

Non-negotiables:

Once you have the full picture, decide what you want to discuss. Keep the negotiation focused on the items that matter most.

Then prepare your value case.

Use this structure:

"I am very interested in the role and can see strong alignment with the priorities discussed. Having reviewed the scope, particularly [key scope areas], I would like to discuss [salary or package item]. Given my experience in [relevant value areas] and the level of responsibility attached to the role, I would be looking for [specific request]."

This keeps the tone professional and clear.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Negotiation is not about being difficult.

It is about ensuring the offer reflects the value, risk, scope, and conditions associated with the role.

At the senior level, you are not negotiating only for income. You are negotiating for the right foundation to do the job well.

Do not accept too quickly because you are relieved.

Pause, review the full package, understand the role properly and make the decision from clarity rather than fear.

CHAPTER 11

Know When to Say No

A strong title or salary does not always mean the role is right. The offer needs to match your values, goals and conditions for success.

CHAPTER 11

Know When to Say No

Getting an offer can feel like the finish line.

After weeks or months of searching, applying, interviewing, waiting, following up and dealing with uncertainty, an offer can bring enormous relief. It can feel like validation. It can feel like proof that the market still sees your value. It can also feel like a way out of a role, organisation or situation you no longer want to stay in.

That relief can be dangerous.

When you have worked hard to get an offer, it is easy to focus on the parts that look good. The title. The salary. The organisation's reputation. The sense of movement. The fact that someone finally said yes.

But a job offer is not always a clear yes.

At the senior level, the wrong role can cost more than time. It can affect your confidence, health, reputation, income, family life and future market position. A poor fit can leave you dealing with unrealistic expectations, unclear authority, weak leadership, cultural issues, broken systems, political pressure or a role that is not what was promised during the process.

This is why the decision stage matters.

You are not only asking, "Can I get this role?"

You are asking, "Should I take this role?"

That is a very different question.

An offer is not the same as alignment

It is possible to be offered a role that is not right for you.

This can be difficult to accept, especially when the search has been hard. Many senior professionals feel pressure to say yes because they do not know when the next opportunity will come. They worry that turning down an offer is irresponsible. They worry they are being too picky. They worry that if they say no, they may regret it.

Sometimes saying yes is the right decision, even if the role is not perfect. No role is perfect. Every senior role comes with compromise, complexity and some level of risk.

But there is a difference between a role with normal challenges and one that is fundamentally misaligned.

A normal challenge might be a function that needs improvement, a team that needs clearer leadership, a system that needs upgrading or a business that needs stronger reporting. These can be good reasons to take a role if you have the authority, support and resources to make an impact.

A misaligned role is different. It may ask you to be accountable for outcomes without giving you decision authority. It may expect transformation without budget, leadership support or realistic timeframes. It may have a poor culture that no one is willing to address. It may have a reporting line that weakens your influence. It may have hidden problems that were not disclosed clearly during the process.

The offer may look good on paper, but the conditions underneath may not support success.

That is the risk you need to assess.

Relief can cloud judgement

Relief is one of the biggest reasons people accept the wrong role.

When you are exhausted by the search, the offer can feel like safety. You may tell yourself that the concerns are not serious. You may ignore things that would have worried you earlier. You may convince yourself that you can fix anything once you are inside.

Sometimes you can.

Sometimes you cannot.

This is why you need a decision process before emotion takes over. The best time to define your dealbreakers is before the offer arrives, not while you are under pressure to respond.

If you decide your non-negotiables early, you are less likely to talk yourself out of them later.

For example, if you know you need clear authority, a respectful reporting line and realistic expectations, you can assess the offer against those criteria. If the role does not provide them, the title and salary need to be carefully considered.

A strong offer should not only look good.

It should make sense.

The role behind the role

The job description is not the full role.

It is the official version.

The real role sits underneath it.

That includes the business problems, leadership dynamics, politics, budget, systems, culture, expectations, reporting line, team capability, decision rights and the real reason the role is vacant.

Before accepting any senior offer, you need to understand the role behind the role.

Why is the role available?

What happened to the previous person?

Is the role newly created?

Is the organisation growing, restructuring, stabilising or trying to fix a problem?

What are the first-year priorities?

What would success look like?

What would failure look like?

Who holds real decision authority?

What support will you have?

What constraints already exist?

What has been tried before?

What is not being said openly?

You may not get perfect answers to every question, but the way people respond will tell you a lot.

Clear answers build confidence.

Vague answers may signal risk.

Defensive answers are worth noticing.

Dealbreakers that should make you pause

Not every concern is a reason to walk away, but some concerns should make you slow down.

One major warning sign is unclear authority. If you are being held accountable for major outcomes but do not have the authority to make decisions, change people, influence budget or adjust priorities, you may be walking into a role where success is difficult from the start.

Another warning sign is a vague or shifting role scope. If the role keeps expanding during the process, but the title, package, resources and authority do not change, you need to clarify expectations before accepting.

A weak reporting line can also create problems. If the role requires executive influence but reports too low in the organisation, you may not have the access needed to deliver.

Poor leadership behaviour during the hiring process is another signal. If leaders are dismissive, disorganised, evasive or disrespectful before you join, that behaviour may not improve once you are inside.

Unrealistic expectations should also make you pause. If the organisation wants a major turnaround in three months, but has no data, no budget, no aligned leadership and no willingness to change, the risk may be too high.

Lack of transparency matters as well. If the organisation avoids discussing why the role is vacant, how performance will be measured, what problems exist or what support will be available, you may be walking in blind.

Cultural issues are another serious factor. If you pick up signs of blame, fear, politics, poor accountability, high turnover or low trust, pay attention.

None of these automatically means you should walk away. But they do mean you should ask more questions.

> **CLIENT EXAMPLE**
>
> A senior candidate came to me after receiving an offer that looked strong on the surface.
>
> The title was appealing. The salary was reasonable. The organisation had a good external reputation. After a long search, she felt relieved and wanted to say yes quickly.
>
> But after properly reviewing the role, several concerns emerged.
>
> The role was being positioned as a senior leadership opportunity, but the reporting line sat lower than expected. She would be accountable for improving performance across several areas, but it was unclear whether she would have authority over the people, systems or decisions needed to make those improvements. The organisation also avoided giving clear answers about why the previous person had left.
>
> None of this meant the role was automatically wrong, but it did mean the risk was higher than it first appeared.
>
> We prepared a list of questions for her to ask before accepting. She asked about decision rights, first-year priorities, team capability, leadership support and how success would be measured. The answers were vague. The scope kept growing, but the authority did not.
>
> She declined the offer.
>
> At first, that was difficult. It felt uncomfortable to walk away from something she had worked hard to secure. But within a few weeks, she felt clear that the decision had protected her. The role would have placed her in a position of high accountability with limited control, and that would have created a serious risk to her confidence and reputation.
>
> Saying no was not a failure.
>
> It was a strategic decision.

Do not ignore how the process feels

The hiring process gives you useful information.

Pay attention to it.

A good process does not need to be perfect, but it should feel respectful, organised and reasonably transparent. People should communicate clearly. They should follow through where possible. They should answer reasonable questions. They should make the role clearer as the process progresses.

A poor process can reveal deeper issues.

If meetings are constantly rescheduled without explanation, communication is weak, the brief keeps changing, or nobody can clearly explain the role priorities, that may reflect how the organisation operates.

If the panel gives conflicting messages, that may signal misalignment.

If the recruiter cannot get clear answers from the client, that may mean the client is unclear.

If the organisation pressures you to accept quickly while avoiding your questions, slow down.

The process is part of the assessment.

You are not only being interviewed.

You are also gathering evidence.

The title can be seductive

Senior titles can be powerful.

CFO. COO. CEO. General Manager. Executive Director. Director. Head of Function.

A strong title can open doors, increase confidence and support your future market position. It can also be tempting when you have been working hard to step up.

But the title alone is not enough.

A title without authority can become a trap. A title without support can create risk. A title without proper scope can leave you disappointed. A title that looks good externally but is weak internally may not give you the influence you need.

Before accepting a role because of the title, ask what it really means within the organisation.

Will you be part of the executive team?

Will you have access to the CEO or board?

Will you make your own decisions, or only make recommendations?

Will you lead a team?

Will you control the budget?

Will you be measured against outcomes you can actually influence?

Will the title strengthen your career story or create questions later?

A senior title should come with senior authority.

If it does not, be careful.

Salary can hide a poor fit

A strong package can make a weak role look more attractive.

Money matters. It affects your life, your family, your choices and your future earning base. It should not be dismissed.

But salary should not be used to ignore serious concerns.

If the role requires unsustainable hours, constant conflict, poor leadership, unclear authority, or unrealistic expectations, the higher salary may not offset the cost.

Many senior professionals know this from experience. They have taken roles that paid well but drained them. They have accepted attractive packages and then found themselves facing problems much bigger than disclosed. They have stayed too long because the money made it harder to leave.

This is why the offer assessment needs to include more than a package.

Ask yourself:

What will this role cost me?

Not just financially.

Emotionally, physically, professionally and personally.

A role can pay well and still be a poor decision.

The right role should be challenging, not impossible

Senior roles should stretch you.

If a role has no challenge, it may not be the right next step. You may want more scope, a bigger problem to solve, more influence, a new sector, a larger team or a more complex environment.

Challenge is not the issue.

The issue is whether the challenge is set up for success.

A good stretch role gives you a meaningful problem, enough authority, reasonable support and a clear path to create value.

A dangerous role brings major problems, limited authority, unclear support, and unrealistic expectations.

The difference matters.

Before accepting, ask whether the role is difficult because it is genuinely valuable work, or difficult because the organisation has not created the conditions for success.

You do not need a perfect environment.

You do need a workable one.

Watch for value conflicts

Value conflicts can become costly, especially at the senior level.

If an organisation's behaviour conflicts with what matters to you, the role may become difficult quickly. This is particularly true when you are expected to represent decisions, lead people or support strategies that do not sit well with you.

Value conflicts may show up in many ways.

Poor treatment of staff.

Lack of transparency.

Unrealistic promises to customers or investors.

Weak governance.

A culture of blame.

Disrespect for expertise.

Pressure to compromise standards.

Leadership that says the right things but behaves differently.

You do not need to agree with every decision an organisation makes. No workplace is perfect. But if the gap between your values and the organisation's behaviour is too large, the role may create ongoing tension.

At the senior level, you are not only doing a job.

You are lending your judgement, reputation and leadership to the organisation.

Make sure you are comfortable with what you are stepping into.

Ask better questions before accepting

The quality of your decision depends on the quality of your information.

Before accepting a senior role, ask questions that reveal the real context.

For example:

"What are the most important outcomes this role needs to deliver in the first six to twelve months?"

"What has made this role critical now?"

"What are the biggest risks or constraints the person stepping into this role should understand?"

"How would you describe the current state of the team?"

"What support will be available to deliver the priorities we have discussed?"

"How much decision authority sits with this role?"

"What has been tried before?"

"How will success be measured?"

"What would make someone unsuccessful in this role?"

"Why did the previous person leave?"

You may not ask all of these questions in one conversation, but you should get clear on the areas that matter most.

The answers will help you decide whether the role is aligned, risky or unclear.

Know your walk-away point

Before you enter final discussions, know your walk-away point.

This does not mean being rigid. It means knowing what would make the role wrong for you.

Your walk-away point may relate to salary, flexibility, reporting line, authority, values, location, travel, workload, culture, role scope or risk.

For example, you may decide not to accept a role where the title suggests executive accountability but the reporting line gives you little real influence. You may decide not to accept a package below a certain level. You may decide not to take a role that requires constant travel. You may decide not to step into a role where the organisation refuses to clarify success measures.

These decisions are easier to make before emotion is involved.

Once the offer is in front of you, it becomes much harder to stay objective.

A walk-away point protects you from accepting something that your clearer self would have rejected.

When saying yes is still the right call

A role does not need to be perfect to be worth accepting.

Sometimes the right role comes with risk. Sometimes there are unknowns. Sometimes the culture needs work, the systems are weak, the team needs rebuilding, or the organisation is under pressure.

Those things can be acceptable if the role aligns with your strengths, values, and career direction.

The question is not whether the role has problems.

The question is whether they are the right problems for you to solve.

If the organisation is honest about the issues, gives you authority, properly supports the role, and values your experience, a difficult role may become a strong career move.

Senior professionals are often hired to fix things. That is normal.

But you need to know what you are fixing and whether you have the conditions to do it well.

Chapter Reflection

Before accepting your next role, ask yourself:

- [ ] Am I accepting this role because it is right, or because I am relieved?
- [ ] Do I understand the real reason this role exists?
- [ ] Have I clarified the first-year priorities?
- [ ] Do I understand the reporting line and decision authority?
- [ ] Does the package reflect the scope and risk?
- [ ] Are there any concerns I am trying to ignore?
- [ ] Do the leaders communicate clearly and respectfully?
- [ ] Is the role challenging in a good way, or risky in a way I cannot control?
- [ ] Does this role support the career direction I want?
- [ ] Would I still want this role if I were not under pressure?

These questions are not designed to make you fearful.

They are designed to help you make a clear decision.

Practical Exercise

The Offer Decision Filter.

Before accepting an offer, rate the role on a scale of 1 to 5 for each of the following areas.

1. Role alignment.
2. Scope and authority.
3. Reporting line.
4. Package.
5. Flexibility.
6. Leadership quality.
7. Culture.
8. Values fit.
9. First-year priorities.
10. Risk level.
11. Support available.
12. Career value.
13. Family or lifestyle impact.
14. Long-term market value.
15. Gut-level confidence.

Then write down:

What feels strong?

What feels unclear?

What feels risky?

What needs to be clarified before I decide?

What am I afraid to ask?

What would make this a clear yes?

What would make this a clear no?

This exercise helps you slow down the decision.

If the role still feels strong after this review, you can accept with greater confidence. If the concerns become louder, listen to them.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A job offer is not always a clear yes.

At a senior level, the wrong role can affect more than your next pay cheque. It can affect your confidence, reputation, health, family life and future market position.

The goal is not to avoid every risk. The goal is to understand the risk before you accept it.

Say yes when the role is aligned, the value is clear, and the conditions support success.

Say no when the title or salary looks good, but the role underneath does not make sense.

CHAPTER 12

Resign Well and Start Strong

How you leave shapes your reputation. How you start shapes the trust, clarity and momentum you build next.

CHAPTER 12

Resign Well and Start Strong

Resignation is not just an administrative step.

At the senior level, the way you leave matters. It affects your reputation, your relationships, your references, your network, and how people remember your leadership. Even if you are leaving a role that has been difficult, disappointing or exhausting, your exit still needs to be handled with care.

This does not mean overexplaining your decision. It does not mean apologising for moving on. It does not mean staying longer than is reasonable because the organisation is uncomfortable. It means leaving with clarity, respect and professionalism.

A senior resignation differs from an early-career resignation because the stakes are higher. You may be leaving a team, a function, a board relationship, a major program, a set of customers, a group of stakeholders or a business that depends on your knowledge. Your departure may create risk, uncertainty or pressure for others. That does not mean you should not leave. It simply means the exit should be managed well.

Your final weeks are part of your leadership story.

People remember how you leave.

Make the decision before you resign

Before you resign, make sure your decision is clear.

This sounds obvious, but many people enter the resignation conversation while still emotionally open to being persuaded. They know they want to leave, but they are not fully anchored in the reasons. They are tired, frustrated or excited about the new role, yet still vulnerable to guilt, pressure or a last-minute counteroffer.

Before speaking with your manager, be clear on three things.

First, why are you leaving?

Second, why the new role is the right move.

Third, what you are and are not willing to discuss.

You do not need to share every reason with your employer. Some reasons may be personal. Some may relate to leadership, culture, workload, values, salary, growth, trust or direction. You can be honest without being blunt, and professional without being dishonest.

What matters is that you are clear with yourself.

If you are not clear before the conversation, the conversation may pull you back into doubt.

Prepare for the conversation

A resignation conversation should be direct, calm and respectful.

It is not the time to download every frustration you have carried for the past year. It is not the time to prove a point, settle a score or make the organisation understand everything it did wrong. Even if your reasons for leaving are valid, your exit conversation should be managed with discipline.

Keep the message simple.

You might say:

"I wanted to let you know that I have accepted another role and will be resigning from my position. This has not been a quick decision, but I believe it is the right next step for me. I am committed to supporting a professional transition and will work with you on the handover plan."

That is enough.

You can express appreciation where it is genuine. You can acknowledge the opportunity, the team or the experience. You can also be clear about your final working date, based on your notice period and employment agreement.

Do not overexplain. The more you explain, the more room you create for debate.

A resignation is not a negotiation unless you make it one.

Put the resignation in writing

After the conversation, provide a written resignation.

The letter does not need to be long. It should confirm your resignation, your role title, your final working date and your willingness to support a handover. Keep the tone professional and factual.

For example:

"Please accept this letter as formal notice of my resignation from my role as [role title]. In line with my notice period, my final working day will be [date]. I appreciate the opportunities I have had during my time with the organisation and will work with you to support a smooth transition."

That is all that is needed.

A resignation letter is not the place for a full career reflection. It is a formal record. Keep it clean.

Expect a reaction

Your resignation may be received with support, surprise, disappointment, frustration or pressure.

A good manager may be disappointed but respectful. A difficult manager may make the conversation emotional. Some organisations may respond quickly and professionally. Others may try to make you feel guilty. Some may immediately ask what it would take to keep you.

Prepare for this before you go in.

If your manager is upset, stay calm. If they ask why, give a clear but measured answer. If they ask whether you would reconsider, be careful. If they ask where you are going, decide in advance how much you want to share.

You do not need to be cold.

You do need to be steady.

A useful line is:

"I understand this may create pressure, and I do not take that lightly. I have made the decision carefully, and I am committed to helping with a professional handover."

This acknowledges the impact without reopening the decision.

Be careful with counteroffers

Counter offers can be tempting.

They often come at the exact moment when your confidence is high and your guilt is rising. Your employer may offer more money, a better title, more flexibility, a new project, a change in reporting line, or a promise that things will improve.

Sometimes a counteroffer is genuine. Sometimes it is simply a way to buy time. Sometimes it reflects the fact that the organisation did not want to lose you, but also did not act until you were leaving.

Before accepting any counteroffer, return to the reasons you looked elsewhere in the first place.

Was the issue salary only?

Was it growth?

Was it culture?

Was it trust?

Was it the workload?

Was it leadership?

Was it a lack of authority?

Was it boredom?

Was it values?

Was it the fact that you had already outgrown the role?

If the counteroffer only solves one small part of the problem, it may not be enough.

A higher salary does not fix poor leadership. A new title does not fix the lack of authority. A promise of change does not fix years of frustration unless it is backed by real evidence.

Counter offers can also affect trust. Once you have resigned, your employer knows you were ready to leave. That may change how they see your commitment, even if they persuade you to stay.

This does not mean you should never accept a counteroffer. There are rare cases where it makes sense. But it should be assessed with clear thinking, not emotion.

Ask yourself:

If this offer had been made three months ago, would I have stayed?

Do I trust that the promised changes will happen?

Does this solve the real issue, or only the immediate discomfort?

Will staying support my longer-term career?

Am I considering this because it is right, or because leaving feels uncomfortable?

If the answers are not strong, be careful.

Protect your reputation during notice

Once you resign, people watch how you behave.

This is not about being perfect. It is about being professional.

Continue doing your work properly. Do not mentally leave before your final day. Do not speak negatively about the organisation, your manager or your reasons for leaving. Do not encourage others to follow you. Do not become careless with confidential information. Do not withdraw from the team in a way that creates unnecessary tension.

Your notice period is short, but it can leave a lasting impression.

This matters because the professional world is smaller than it looks. Former managers become referees. Former peers become future clients, recruiters, board members, employers or advocates. People move across industries. Reputations travel.

A poor exit can undo years of good work.

A strong exit can reinforce your credibility.

Build a proper handover

A good handover protects your team, your stakeholders and your reputation.

At the senior level, your handover should not be a random list of tasks. It should help the organisation understand what needs attention, what is in progress, the risks, and the decisions that may be required after you leave.

Your handover may include:

1. Key responsibilities.
2. Current projects.
3. Critical deadlines.
4. Key stakeholders.
5. Team structure and current issues.
6. Risks and watch points.
7. Decisions pending.
8. Reporting cycles.
9. Important documents and system access.
10. Supplier, customer or board commitments.
11. Recommendations for the next thirty to ninety days.
12. Any unresolved issues that need ownership.

The aim is not to make yourself irreplaceable. It is to leave the organisation with clarity.

A strong handover shows maturity. It also reduces the chance of people blaming your departure for problems that were already there.

Manage communication with the team

If you lead a team, your resignation will affect them.

People may feel surprised, disappointed, worried or uncertain about what your departure means for them. Some may ask where you are going. Some may want advice. Some may become anxious about the future of the function.

You do not need to manage everything for the organisation, but you do need to communicate responsibly.

Agree with your manager or executive leader on how and when the announcement will be made. Do not tell people randomly before the organisation has a plan. Once the team knows, keep your message clear and steady.

You might say:

"I have accepted a new role and will be leaving on [date]. This was a considered decision and the right next step for me. My focus over the notice period will be supporting the team, completing key handover items and making sure the transition is as clear as possible."

Avoid oversharing. Avoid creating fear. Avoid criticising the organisation.

Your team does not need every detail.

They need calm, clarity and professionalism.

Manage stakeholders carefully

Senior roles often involve stakeholders beyond your immediate team.

You may need to inform executives, board members, clients, suppliers, partners, auditors, regulators or project sponsors. The communication should be agreed with your manager or the relevant leader to ensure consistency.

For key stakeholders, a short professional note is usually enough.

You can thank them for the working relationship, confirm your final date and let them know who will be the point of contact after you leave. If appropriate, offer to support a transition conversation.

Keep the tone positive, even if the relationship has been difficult.

You are closing the loop, not opening a debate.

Leave the door open where appropriate

Not every exit needs to be dramatic.

You can leave an organisation and still maintain strong relationships. In fact, many senior careers are built on relationships that continue long after a role ends.

Where appropriate, connect with key people on LinkedIn. Thank those who supported you. Offer appreciation to team members. Send a short note to people who had a meaningful impact on your time in the organisation.

This does not need to be sentimental. It simply needs to be thoughtful.

You never know when a former colleague may become a future client, referee, recruiter contact, board connection or source of market insight.

Leaving well keeps those doors open.

Do not start the new role carrying old frustrations

Once you leave, give yourself a clean break where possible.

This is especially important if you are leaving a difficult environment. It is easy to carry old frustration into the new role. You may enter the new organisation guarded, reactive or determined not to repeat the past. While that is understandable, it can affect how you show up.

Before starting the new role, take time to reflect.

What did the last role teach you?

What do you want to do differently?

What patterns do you need to leave behind?

What boundaries matter now?

What do you need to rebuild?

What confidence do you need to restore?

What will help you start well?

A new role is not only a new title or salary. It is a chance to reset how you work, lead and make decisions.

Do not waste that by dragging every old problem with you.

Start strong by listening first

Many senior professionals feel pressure to prove themselves quickly in a new role.

That is understandable. You want to show the organisation that it made the right decision. You want to build credibility. You want to make progress.

But moving too quickly can create problems.

Before changing things, understand the environment. Listen to the team. Meet key stakeholders. Understand the history. Look at the data. Review previous decisions. Learn what has already been tried. Identify where trust is strong and where it is weak. Understand what people are worried about.

A strong start is not about making noise.

It is about building an accurate picture.

In the first thirty to ninety days, your job is to learn, assess, build relationships and identify where you can create the most useful early value.

This does not mean being passive. It means being thoughtful.

Clarify expectations early

One of the best ways to start well is to clarify expectations early.

Even if the interview process was detailed, things can shift once you are inside the organisation. The role may be broader than described. The priorities may have changed. Stakeholders may have different views of what success looks like.

Do not assume alignment.

Ask.

Clarify what success looks like in the first thirty, sixty and ninety days. Understand what your manager or board expects. Ask what needs immediate attention and what can wait. Identify the decisions that need to be made early. Understand where there are risks, sensitivities or political issues.

This gives you a stronger base.

It also reduces the chance of working hard on the wrong things.

Build trust before making major changes

Senior leaders are often hired to improve something.

That may be performance, reporting, culture, governance, cost, delivery, growth or control. The temptation is to move quickly, especially if the problems are obvious.

But change without trust can create resistance.

Before making major changes, understand who will be affected and what they care about. Some people may have lived through several failed attempts at change before you arrived. Some may be tired. Some may be protective. Some may be sceptical of another new leader promising improvement.

Trust does not mean avoiding hard decisions. It means earning enough credibility that people understand why decisions are being made.

Your early behaviour matters.

Do what you say you will do. Listen properly. Be clear. Avoid making promises too early. Give credit. Address issues directly. Be consistent.

That is how you build authority without forcing it.

Set boundaries from the beginning

The early weeks of a new role can set patterns that are hard to change later.

If you accept unreasonable hours immediately, it may become expected. If you say yes to everything, people may assume you have unlimited capacity. If you take on work without clarifying ownership, you may inherit problems that should not sit with you. If you avoid difficult conversations early, issues may grow.

This does not mean being rigid. It means being clear.

Senior roles require judgement around workload, priorities and boundaries. You need to understand what matters most and where your energy should go.

Starting strong includes protecting your ability to do the job well.

Chapter Reflection

Before you resign, ask yourself:

- [ ] Am I clear on why I am leaving?
- [ ] Have I reviewed my contract and notice period?
- [ ] Do I know what I will say in the resignation conversation?
- [ ] Am I prepared for a counteroffer?
- [ ] Do I know my final working date?
- [ ] Have I planned a professional handover?
- [ ] Who needs to be informed, and in what order?
- [ ] How will I communicate with my team?
- [ ] What relationships do I want to preserve?
- [ ] How do I want people to remember my exit?
- [ ] What do I need to learn first?
- [ ] Who are the key stakeholders?
- [ ] What does success look like in the first ninety days?
- [ ] What risks need early attention?
- [ ] What boundaries do I need to set?

- [ ] What old habits or frustrations do I need to let go of?
- [ ] How will I build trust before making major changes?

Before you start the new role, ask yourself:

Practical Exercise

Your Exit and Entry Plan

Create two simple plans.

First, your exit plan.

Write down:

Resignation date:

Final working date:

People to inform:

Key handover items:

Current projects:

Risks to document:

Stakeholders to brief:

Team communication plan:

Final messages to send:

Relationships to maintain:

Second, your entry plan.

Write down:

First thirty-day priorities:

People to meet:

Questions to ask:

Documents to review:

Business problems to understand:

Early risks to assess:

Quick wins to consider:

Boundaries to set:

Trust-building actions:

Success measures to clarify:

This exercise helps you move from one role to the next with more control.

You are not just leaving one job and starting another.

You are closing one chapter properly and setting up the next one with intent.

KEY TAKEAWAY

How you leave matters.

How you start matters too.

A strong resignation protects your reputation, relationships and professional credibility. A strong start helps you build trust, understand the business and create early value without rushing into the wrong decisions.

At the senior level, your career is not only shaped by the roles you win.

It is also shaped by how you exit, how you enter and how people experience your leadership along the way.

FINAL SECTION

Your Executive Career Positioning Checklist

FINAL SECTION

Your Executive Career Positioning Checklist

By now, you should have a much clearer view of what senior career positioning really means.

It is not just your resume.

It is not just your LinkedIn profile.

It is not just your interview performance.

It is the way your value is understood across the market.

At the senior level, every part of your career presence needs to work together. Your resume, LinkedIn profile, recruiter conversations, network messages, interview examples and offer decisions should all support the same clear message.

Who are you?

What level do you operate at?

What problems do you solve?

What value do you bring?

What role are you ready for next?

If those answers are unclear, the market may struggle to place you. If they are clear, you become much easier to find, refer, shortlist and seriously consider.

This checklist is designed to help you assess where your positioning is strong and where it may need work.

Use it honestly.

The goal is not to mark yourself harshly. The goal is to see the gaps before they cost you opportunities.

1. Your Target Role

Before your resume, LinkedIn profile or job search strategy can work properly, you need to know what you are positioning yourself for.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Do I know the level of role I am targeting?
- [ ] Can I name the titles that make sense for my next move?
- [ ] Can I explain the type of organisation that would value my experience?
- [ ] Do I know the business problems I am best placed to solve?
- [ ] Can I explain why my next move makes sense?
- [ ] Do I know which roles I should stop applying for?
- [ ] Have I identified my non-negotiables?
- [ ] Can I describe my target role in one clear sentence?

If you are not clear on the role, the rest of your positioning will become harder.

A broad search may feel safer, but it often makes placement harder. The market needs a clear signal. Your target does not need to be narrow to the point of being limiting, but it does need to be clear enough for recruiters, hiring managers and your network to understand where you fit.

2. Your Resume

Your resume should not read like a list of tasks.

It should make a clear business case for your value.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Does my profile clearly show who I am and what value I bring?
- [ ] Does my resume demonstrate the level at which I operate?
- [ ] Have I included enough context around scale, scope and complexity?
- [ ] Do my role summaries explain the purpose of each position?
- [ ] Do my responsibilities show ownership, judgement, and leadership?
- [ ] Do my achievements lead with the business benefit?
- [ ] Have I used numbers where they strengthen the point?
- [ ] Does my resume show impact, not just activity?
- [ ] Does it support the role I want next?
- [ ] Would a recruiter, CEO, board member, or hiring manager quickly understand my value?

If your resume is accurate but not converting, it may not be a capability issue. It may be a positioning issue.

A senior resume needs to show what changed because of your leadership. It needs to show the business value of your work, not simply the work itself.

3. Your LinkedIn Profile

Your LinkedIn profile should support both search and trust.

It should help the right people find you, understand you and feel confident enough to start a conversation.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Does my headline show more than my current title?
- [ ] Does it include my function, level and value?
- [ ] Does my About section explain the business problems I solve?
- [ ] Does my experience section show scope and impact?
- [ ] Have I used the right keywords for the roles I want next?
- [ ] Does my profile support the same message as my resume?
- [ ] Would a recruiter know what to approach me for?
- [ ] Would a former colleague know how to refer me?
- [ ] Am I being found for the right roles?
- [ ] Does my LinkedIn activity support my professional positioning?

LinkedIn does not need to tell your full career story, but it does need to make your market value clear.

If your profile is too thin, too generic or too focused on your current role, it may quietly limit the opportunities that reach you.

4. Your Search Strategy

A senior job search should not rely only on advertised roles.

Job boards can be useful, but they are only one part of the market.

Ask yourself:

- [ ] Am I relying too heavily on online applications?
- [ ] Have I identified recruiters who work in my target market?
- [ ] Have I reconnected with people who know my work?
- [ ] Does my network understand what I am looking for?
- [ ] Have I created warm routes into target organisations where possible?
- [ ] Am I tracking recruiter conversations, referrals, and follow-ups?
- [ ] Am I measuring the quality of the activity, not just the volume?
- [ ] Do I have a weekly search rhythm?
- [ ] Am I creating conversations, or only waiting for roles to appear?

If your search is built only around applications, you may be missing the part of the market that moves through referral, search and private conversation.

The strongest senior searches are planned. They combine applications, recruiter contact, LinkedIn visibility, network reactivation and clear market positioning.

5. Your Referral Strategy

People cannot refer you properly if they do not understand what you want.

A strong referral strategy depends on clarity.

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Can my network explain my value in one or two sentences?
- ☐ Have I given trusted contacts a clear brief?
- ☐ Do I know who in my network is connected to my target market?
- ☐ Have I identified former colleagues, senior leaders, clients or advisers who know my work?
- ☐ Have I made it easy for people to introduce me?
- ☐ Do I have a short positioning message ready?
- ☐ Am I following up professionally?
- ☐ Am I building relationships before I urgently need them?

If your outreach sounds like "please keep me in mind," it may not be strong enough.

People need to know which opportunities would be relevant. The clearer your message, the easier it is for others to help.

6. Your Interview Positioning

A senior interview is not about repeating your resume.

It is about showing judgement, impact and trust.

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Can I explain my value clearly in the first few minutes?
- ☐ Do I understand the business problem the role addresses?
- ☐ Do my examples show level, scope and impact?
- ☐ Can I speak about commercial value, not just process?
- ☐ Do I explain the judgement behind my decisions?
- ☐ Can I discuss risk, trade-offs and lessons learned?
- ☐ Do I have examples that show leadership, influence and business outcomes?
- ☐ Can I address gaps or concerns without sounding defensive?
- ☐ Do my questions show senior thinking?
- ☐ Can I explain why this role makes sense as my next move?

If you are getting interviews but not offers, the issue may not be experience. It may be how your experience is being communicated.

At the senior level, strong answers connect context, action, judgement, and outcome. They show how you think, not just what you did.

7. Your Confidence and Setback Response

Setbacks are part of a senior job search, but they should not rewrite your sense of value.

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Am I treating silence as proof, or as incomplete information?
- ☐ Do I know where I am dropping out of the process?
- ☐ Am I applying for aligned roles, or reacting to anxiety?
- ☐ Have I reviewed my resume, LinkedIn profile and route to market properly?
- ☐ Am I lowering my expectations too quickly?
- ☐ Am I making changes based on evidence, not fear?
- ☐ Can I separate my capability from market response?
- ☐ Do I have a structure that protects my confidence?

A slow search can affect even the strongest professionals.

The answer is not blind positivity. The answer is a clear assessment. Look at the evidence, find the pattern and fix the right problem.

8. Your Offer Decision Process

A job offer is not always a clear yes.

Before accepting, assess the full role, not just the title and salary.

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Do I understand the full package?
- ☐ Does the salary reflect the scope and risk?
- ☐ Is the bonus structure clear?
- ☐ Do I understand the reporting line?
- ☐ Will I have the authority needed to succeed?
- ☐ Are the first-year priorities realistic?
- ☐ Do I trust the leadership I will report to?
- ☐ Does the culture feel aligned?
- ☐ Have I clarified any concerns before signing?
- ☐ Am I accepting clarity, or relief?

A strong offer should be assessed carefully.

At the senior level, the wrong role can cost more than time. It can affect your health, confidence, reputation, income and future options.

9. Your Resignation and First 90 Days

How you leave matters.

How you start matters too.

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Am I clear on why I am leaving?
- ☐ Have I prepared a professional resignation message?
- ☐ Have I planned a clean handover?
- ☐ Do I know how to handle a counteroffer?
- ☐ Have I protected key relationships?
- ☐ Have I thought about how I want to be remembered?
- ☐ Do I understand what I need to learn in the new role?
- ☐ Have I clarified the expectations for the first 30, 60, and 90 days?
- ☐ Do I know which stakeholders I need to build trust with early?
- ☐ Have I set boundaries that will help me perform well?

Your resignation is not the end of the process.

It is part of your professional reputation.

Your first 90 days in the new role are also part of your positioning. They set the tone for how people experience your leadership.

Your Executive Career Positioning Score

Give yourself a score from 1 to 5 for each area.

1 means this area needs serious work.

5 means this area is strong and clear.

Target role clarity:	
Resume positioning:	
LinkedIn visibility:	
Search strategy:	
Referral strategy:	
Interview positioning:	
Confidence and setback response:	
Offer decision process:	
Resignation and first 90-day plan:	
Total score:	

If your score is below 30, your career positioning likely needs significant work.

If your score is between 30 and 38, you may have a reasonable foundation, but there are likely gaps costing you traction.

If your score is 39 or above, your positioning is stronger, but you may still need refinement depending on the level of role you are targeting.

This score is not about judgement.

It is about visibility.

Once you can see the gaps, you can fix them.

Final Reflection

Senior professionals are often told to update their resume, apply for roles and prepare for interviews.

That advice is not wrong.

It is just incomplete.

At the senior level, the market needs more than a clean resume and a polished interview. It needs a clear reason to see you as relevant. It needs to understand your level, your value, your fit and your future direction.

If the market is not responding, do not assume you lack capability.

Ask whether your value is clear enough.

Ask whether your resume proves the right things.

Ask whether your LinkedIn profile is helping the right people find you.

Ask whether your network knows what you are looking for.

Ask whether your interview answers show judgement and impact.

Ask whether your offer decisions are being made from clarity or fear.

These are the questions that change the quality of your search.

The goal is not to look impressive.

The goal is to be understood properly by the people who can refer, approach, shortlist, and hire you.

FINAL KEY TAKEAWAY

Your next role will not come from effort alone.

It will come from clear positioning, strong evidence, relevant visibility and a search strategy that matches the senior market.

Experience matters.

But the market needs to understand what that experience means.

That is your work now.

NEXT STEP

Book Your Complimentary CLARITY Strategy Session

If you have worked through this guide and realised your resume, LinkedIn profile, or career story is not presenting you at the level you are ready for next, you are not alone.

Many senior professionals are highly capable, yet their positions do not reflect the true value of their experience. Their resume reads like a list of responsibilities. Their LinkedIn profile makes them hard to find. Their interview examples sound too operational. Their network is unclear on what they want next. Their job search becomes reactive rather than strategic.

That does not mean they lack ability.

It means the market is not seeing the full picture.

This is exactly what we look at inside a complimentary 30-minute CLARITY Strategy Session, valued at $497.

This is a focused career strategy conversation designed to help you understand what may be holding you back and what needs to change so you can present yourself more clearly, commercially and confidently in the senior market.

In this session, we look at where you are now, where you want to go next, and whether your current positioning supports that move. We may discuss your resume, LinkedIn profile, target roles, search strategy, interview approach or broader career direction, depending on what is most relevant for you.

The goal is not to give you generic advice.

The goal is to give you clear, honest insight from someone who understands how senior hiring actually works.

This session may be right for you if

You are applying for senior roles and not getting interviews.

You are getting interviews but not converting them into offers.

You feel your resume does not reflect the level you operate at.

You know your LinkedIn profile needs work, but you are not sure what to change.

You are being approached for roles that are too junior.

You are unsure how to clearly explain your value.

You are ready for a better role, promotion, or pay rise, but your positioning does not yet support it.

You are relying too heavily on job boards and want a stronger market strategy.

You want an honest view on what may be missing from your current approach.

What we will look at

During the session, we will focus on the areas that matter most for your next move.

That may include:

Your current career positioning.

The roles you are targeting.

Whether your resume is showing value or just duties.

Whether your LinkedIn profile is clear enough for a recruiter search.

Whether your career story supports the level you want next.

Where your search may be breaking down.

What needs to change before you go back to market?

You will leave with a clearer view of the gaps and your next step.

Why this matters

The senior market is selective.

That does not mean there are no opportunities. It means the market needs a clear reason to pay attention.

If your value is hard to understand, you may be overlooked despite having the right experience. If your resume is too task-based, your impact may be missed. If your LinkedIn profile is not aligned with the roles you want, recruiters may not find you. If your search strategy relies only on advertised roles, you may be missing the opportunities that move through search, referral and private conversation.

You do not need to work harder at a broken strategy.

You need to strengthen your positioning.

Book your session

If you are ready to understand what may be missing from your resume, LinkedIn profile or career strategy, you can book your complimentary 30 minute CLARITY Strategy Session here:

https://calendly.com/belindapariscoach/clarity-call

This is your opportunity to get clear on what is working, what is not, and what needs to change so the market can properly see your value.

Final Closing Note

Your career does not need to be left to chance.

At the senior level, the right role rarely comes from effort alone. It comes from clear positioning, strong evidence, relevant visibility and a strategy that matches how senior hiring really works.

You have already done the hard work of building your experience.

Now the market needs to understand what that experience means.

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