

# Careers

## People with Talent (Like Us) 10 Pillars to Build Your Dream Career

Part 1  
Designing Your Life Strategy

By  
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**Amrop**

Leaders For What's Next

# People with Talent (People Like Us)

## 10 Pillars to Build your Dream Career

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She is the author of two books: 'I Am My Biggest Project', and the recently-published 'People with Talent' on which this article series is based.

Maria was named one of the world's Top 200 Executive Recruitment Consultants (Nancy Garrison-Jenn).

She has an MA in Psychology with a specialization in Business Organizational Development.



This book was written in response to a challenge, a proposal of the kind I had often received before. I tentatively accepted to share a little more of my professional experience, learnings personally gathered in the process of supporting hiring organizations, and from the professionals I met along the way as an executive search consultant.

In my previous book, *I Am My Biggest Project* (see our Amrop series) it seems readers most liked the stories I told to support various aspects of the 'socio-professional I' that the book addressed in a more or less theoretical way.

So I take that as my starting point here. I start each chapter with stories that marked me throughout my career, protecting the names of the people involved. I will share ten themes that seem fundamental when we talk about constructing a professional career. Namely:

Life strategy. Motivation. Talent. Risk-taking. Persistence and passion. Emotional intelligence. Self exposure and abundance. Time and choice. Failure. Uniqueness, and playing a role in the world.



For all who seek a script of ideas for reflection (particularly at a time as difficult as the one we're currently going through), this book leaves the reader with many clues and a smile as we realize that life and beauty belong to us. If the virus reminded us of some very prosaic realities, this is one of them!

Pedro Rebelo de Sousa Lisboa



These themes cover a wide range of perspectives in terms of their position at the cutting edge of the debate and in the way they are approached.

For example, we travel from the much-visited intrinsic motivation, to the futuristic concepts of exponential, abundant life as defended by Silicon Valley and Singularity University. I present cases where a person takes advantage of his or her original talent and expands on it to achieve goals that are remarkable both for the individual and for his or her wider entourage.

But I also tell other stories; of people who serenely followed the passage of their days, letting life take them like a leaf in the wind.

Throughout my career, I have seen how some of these pillars influence people's lives. How their actions, their decision-making processes and vision of themselves and the world influenced their decisions and professional projects. By telling their stories and talking about these pillars, I hope in some way to help readers to build a unique and coherent professional journey, one that leads to a motivated and accomplished way of life.

### **Knowing that we don't know**

As I finish writing, I am myself in a process of intense and violent learning when it comes to the missionary, moralistic and desperate attitudes of people towards the viral war we are experiencing thanks to COVID-19. It seems that the people who know the least are the ones who are most inclined to predict what is right and wrong.

Few people are wise enough to admit that their knowledge is restricted to possible interpretations of medical reports and mathematical modeling. I hope I belong to the group that is aware that they know nothing, but I do try to improve my knowledge and I know that each one of us has to do what we think is right, to be useful, and not go into a state of hibernation.

Throughout my life I have been on a constant search for learning, knowledge and training. When I set out to write this book, these were the principles that guided me: sharing the inspiration for change and personal optimization, through real stories, always rethinking and trying to improve.

Because I am certain that THE FUTURE BEGINS TODAY.



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## Francisco's story

Francisco was born in a city in the Portuguese interior. He grew up in a family that was well-known in the region. His great-grandfather was heir to several generations of influential and highly respected people. He was first to drive a car through the province beyond a 100 kilometer radius of Lisbon. In the early 20th century, he imported a Fiat. Years later, Francisco felt moved when he saw the very same car at the Caramulo Museum and read his ancestor's name on the display, described as a pioneer of automotive import in Portugal.

In his city, there was a garden bearing his great-grandfather's name; indeed, he was widely and proudly referred to as a pillar of the region. He had always been concerned about the development of the area.

He succeeded in taking the Polytechnic School of Animal Production to the city, as well as the Agro-Industrial Management course and School of Education, among other facilities. He also managed to influence the central authorities to develop a health center that later turned into a hospital, built a center for senior citizens and a cinema not only showing films, but also hosting plays and other touring shows.

As a traveler who regularly visited Europe's top houses of culture, he understood the importance of cultural education. He created a music and ballet teaching center with his name which today continues to train young artists for the international stage. It set the standard in the region and left a legacy that turned into a heavy heritage.

Francisco's grandmother graduated as a pharmacist in the Portuguese city of Coimbra. She was one of the first women to complete a degree at the city's prestigious university. She was a woman of aristocratic bearing, obsessed with etiquette and good manners, always saying that people had everything to gain from the right and proper, refined aristocratic treatment. Francisco's father barely talked about his grandfather. It seems he was over-fond of gambling, hunting and having a good time with his friends. By living so intensely he died very young of a heart attack; however, he still had time to undersell a small textile weaving industry that he inherited from his grandmother, and divest a significant area of agricultural land.

## The storm before the calm

Francisco's father went to college in Lisbon in the 1960s. This was a time of change and discovery. A host of powerful social stimuli attacked him and his peers like tropical storms. He failed two academic years, during one of which he attended almost no classes. He managed to hitchhike to Burgundy where he stayed on a farm, going on one date after another, until his mother forced him to come home by cutting off his allowance. At the time, dropping out of university meant only one thing — mandatory military service. After an experience like this, the hyper-aggressive experience of the war and all the resulting deprivations, it was difficult on his return to resume life as an immature student.

He didn't graduate, or prepare for anything in particular. He didn't even know how to organize his ideas and decide what he wanted to do. He found a job in local government with the aid of his family name, his lifestyle dedicated more to his remarkable music collection and local radio than any other form of sustenance. He was like an aged, impoverished count: he had inherited the name, the lineage and even prestige in the region's collective imagination. But he had nowhere to lay his hat at the end of his life.

Francisco's mother had been a beautiful girl, the daughter of her grandmother's seamstress. As almost always happens in these stories, she caught his father's eye and he became utterly determined to gain her favor.

Still, his father and mother were more or less happy in their little world. Neither of them showed any sign of dissatisfaction with their quiet life. Harmony reigned, it seemed. The lack of drama and ability to go any further gave them a perception of slow-moving routine, a grayish acceptance of the running of years, without any desire for any other kind of existence.

The father had a way of channeling everything he had left undone into other activities: he collected music, vinyl and more, all the new trends reached Francisco's ears via his father's continuous updates. He had a lot of sensitivity and an ear for music; something he effortlessly caught on to and reproduced. And that's how Francisco became a distinguished classical music student at the Academy founded by his great-grandfather. Of course, he didn't pay tuition fees, because he was a descendant of the school's founder and because no student in the collective memory had been as intuitive and sensitive to sound, rhythm and musical expression.

Growing up in such an environment, Francisco was in a position of the vicarious power his family represented in this provincial city. He felt like an "ex something", more figurative than representative, enjoying a relaxed existence without any obligations, but with a bitter feeling of an unfulfilled duty to society.

He could have chosen to continue that lethargic life. He could even have resented his position, voicing a kind of reverse inequality related to the inward-looking circumstances in which he found himself. But Francisco was full of determination and took off for a different life, another existence.

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## Paradigm Shift

Most of the time, change isn't easy. It takes work, investment and risk. We leave our familiar paradigm and jump onto new ground which we don't yet master. We leave our so-called comfort zone, the routine in which everything is predictable, controllable and comfortable.

To change and identify the direction we want our career to take, we must be able to conduct a self-analysis and take a critical view of ourselves. It takes mental lucidity to look in the mirror, identify our profile, get to know ourselves, our added value and flaws, and reach an understanding of what we need to do, what skills we need to learn and exercise to improve — to shape ourselves into the person we want to be in the future.

Sometimes we sense a need for change, but feel this in a whirlwind of emotions. To find the lucidity to make the right change, we must embark upon honest self-reflection. We must think clearly and rationally about the reasons for the change we crave, and the factors necessary to move it forward. These variables will be as disruptive and fracturing as the change we're proposing. They can range from adapting to a new culture, (when moving to a different country for example), going into an unfriendly social climate, transferring from a traditional industry to an epicenter of innovation and technology.

### Talking and touring

A rich and honest inner dialogue is fundamental. One that enables us to acquire the skills we need to design a new path, a new direction. Often, change is made without a defined direction, keeping us stuck in a career that doesn't motivate us. But as we haven't worked out the map, we don't know where we're headed.

We must have the wisdom to make the right decision on how to change. To develop a deep inner life; to practice introspection, the ability to meditate and reflect as an individual on our life themes, to optimize and train our discernment. These decisions, from our current location to our destination, all flow from our inner thinking. There is no standard check-list of "do's and don'ts", "strengths and weaknesses", to which we can resort in this analysis, this inner assessment is unique and takes time to mature.

Of course, individual reflection doesn't mean that we shouldn't listen to the wisdom of those around us. It is essential that we seek this out if we're to make the right decisions. We can seek this knowledge in education, in reading, but also in the wise people I'm referring to. Who are they? Sages are usually people with experience, who have already traveled a few kilometers on the same roads as we have, who can therefore be our co-pilot in this change. But people who know how to observe, reflect, think and empower are also wise. They take an empathetic approach, focused on others.

It is essential to be aware that each of us is the agent of our change, we own the decision to manage our own existence and take action. Because without action the decision loses usefulness.

Perceiving the dynamics of change presupposes the need and ability to understand and take responsibility for the desire for transformation. Change is idealized then mobilized. Let's take action.

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Francisco's inheritance was mostly non-material. Sure, he had a family lineage and name, but nothing more. He possessed nothing that would allow him to even *be* in a big city whilst thinking about his life choices. However, he decided to rely on himself and go on an adventure — a change. Francisco went to Lisbon to make his mark. He wanted to take anything life had to offer in order to empower himself. He had to prove to himself that, just maybe, he might be able to shape his own existence, create his future and influence his destiny.

He roomed with a woman from his home district, in Sacavém, a suburb of Lisbon. It was as if he'd exchanged all the perks of the land for the exact opposite. He became, in a sense, the tenant of someone who could once have been a family employee. He didn't consider any of this to be an obstacle. He made the most of the opportunity to reach his goal: getting closer to the best, most avant-garde music scene.

### Voice in the wilderness

It was very difficult to be seen by anyone interesting, let alone heard. This world, like others, has its "initiation rituals". People have to be connected to particular schools and vocational environments to even get started, and then, if all goes well, they will be noticed and referenced, catch the attention of the influencers who bring out new talent and help them get recognized. Someone coming from the provinces like Francisco was viewed as just another naïve stumbler, groping in the dark to see if the people who mattered would allow him to be in the places that mattered, even as a decoration.

On a personal level, too, everything had changed, and with it came the need to adapt. Despite his condition of "new poor" in his city, Francisco had all he needed for a comfortable existence. He lived in the family home in the main square with someone to take care of everything in exchange for a roof, and almost nothing more. He was like a count who had disappeared from the county but was still well thought of and had nothing to worry about.

Now, in addition to the little room at Dona Lucília's home in Sacavém, sharing a bathroom, he also had to learn to exchange veal steak and French fries in olive oil for fast food: hamburgers, sushi by the pound, and lots of pizza.

But Francisco hung on. He was so persistent, so resilient and had such an available and humble attitude that he managed to make a difference. Finally, a famous musician noticed him and invited him to be his assistant.

A "reliable guy", said the people in erudite circles. A "nice guy," they all said. He delivered on his commitments, went along with all the follies, helped others, and was always where he was needed.



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It was a very tough mission. Of course, it took talent, but it also took also a lot of work, forcing him to develop resilience when facing setbacks and difficulties.

Francisco had classical music training. He had started out with musical theory, later playing the flute, violin and piano. He liked every aspect of his musical education, but no single instrument completely fulfilled him. It seemed he was missing another kind of experience. Early on, he had felt the brutal, sensual effect of the whirlwind of Portuguese popular music collected by his father, especially some rock. He gradually became a “democratic” scholar. He liked contemporary trends and his classical training served as a strong foundation for interpretation and criticism. This all gave him a distinctive edge in his work as an assistant and helped him secure his place.

However, a couple of years sufficed for Francisco to become aware that he couldn't stay where he was. Again, this could have become a brownish, muddy existence, this time in an urban, even cosmopolitan, way. He met and befriended people from all kinds of backgrounds who, step by step, put down roots. But Francisco felt he had to take a new leap.

Although he had improved his life, living in a shared house in Alto de Santa Catarina with his own kitchen and eating whatever he liked, he knew that he could and should do more. He had created strong friendships and even some loves, but he still felt compelled to do something else. He had not yet reached the point where he could feel good about himself and accomplished. The need for change came knocking again.

With his small savings and some very moderate support from the family, he found the ability to ‘follow his own fate’ and move to the USA. In New York, Dubspot provided his formal training.

## Sound tracking

However, regardless of all the hard work that happens when we emigrate, in Francisco's case, his sights were set on the objective: to be able to produce high quality, innovative music that would allow him to share all the sounds that had been buzzing in his head for a long time, so strongly that they were almost deafening him.

It was a very tough mission. Of course, it took talent, but it also took also a lot of work, forcing him to develop resilience when facing setbacks and difficulties.

He decided to move forward, always applying determination and effort to his activities, until he got recognition.

On his search for the right sound, he went to Seattle, maintaining his links with Europe, particularly Bristol. He walked all over a world boiling with innovation, until he felt a sense of himself as an individual, and a feeling of unison.

He worked in groups, in bands and solo, experimenting a little on his own, and a little with the effect and feed-back of his sound, the music he created. But he also felt the need to walk along the ‘god-given’ tracks of his life.

He meditated and experimented, connected with this and that until he was really able to find himself. After living through different experiences, he felt able to move forward with his own project.





## Building your personal brand

Francisco understood that he had to 'create himself': build an image that corresponded to the 'product' he sought to be. This meant exercising deep, honest, self-knowledge. From that self-image, he could develop and create his persona, external image and personal brand.

This is a process that begins with self-analysis, operates through self-knowledge, and then demands an ability to strategically define where we want to get to, supporting or leveraging the brand we have created to achieve this goal — a defined objective. Francisco's goal was to produce his own music.

He had to create his own image and raise its reputation.

People who know how to use the concepts of image and reputation to their advantage practically enshrine them. Image and reputation can be understood as personal marketing.

Our personal brand aims to position ourselves in the minds of others as we want to be seen. Developing one is about identifying and communicating the characteristics that make us stand out as relevant, visible, attractive and unique.

To do this, once again and as ever, we need to carry out the all-important reflection and self-analysis. Only then can we identify what sets us apart.

Our personal brand is a reflection of who we truly are. It differentiates us and makes us distinctive in what we do. It gives us added value in the executive labor market.

*Reflect:* What sets you apart? What are your assets? What characteristics make you different? What value do you want to communicate?

What sets you apart from the rest? What are your assets? What characteristics make you different? What value do you want to communicate?



### Francisco created his own personal brand: DJ X.

He started his music career for real. He performed with world-famous names, creating songs that resonated with anyone who kept up with the latest trends. After successfully playing the most demanding stages, he got to number one on the Club Chart of Billboard magazine.

From then on, clubs started to open their doors to DJ X. Today, he has stamps from clubs all around the world on his resumé.

At the same time as DJ-ing, two further activities entered DJ X's life: radio, then publishing. He puts out his own albums, bets on the next big thing in the music scene and disseminates his remixes for recognized names. His output is distributed in markets such as the US, the UK and Germany. With more than 15 000 copies sold, he has reached the gold standard. And since success comes in threes, MTV invited him to feature on the poster of a festival considered the best in the world. He has a spot on the top 100 DJ list.

“Entrepreneurship is the persistent progression towards an innovative solution to a key problem. It’s the constant hunger for making things better and the idea that you are never satisfied with how things are.”

*Debbie Roxarzade, founder and CEO of Rachel’s Kitchen restaurant chain*

Definitions of entrepreneurship are typically focused on launching and managing companies. However, due to the high stakes of a start-up, we can add the notion of ownership. So entrepreneurship distills the characteristics that an individual like Francisco needs to launch himself into the personal enterprise of self-creation and development as a ‘brand’. We can see this as a product, a differentiated and autonomous form of professional life. Making this kind of effort means being ready and willing to take risks, to develop and manage an innovation or change, to be determined and courageous.

An entrepreneur can recognize the potential of his or her invention, executing an idea, a concept or solution where nothing existed before. Discovering something new, original — and difficult. But next we need to organize the physical and financial resources, the talent and other factors that transform an invention into a viable innovation. So, innovation means making the new viable, creating the means for the invention to serve a concrete objective. In this sense, the term ‘entrepreneurship’ also captures the innovative and unique life of the entrepreneurial agent, his or her autonomy and property.

Francisco was able to define himself, become autonomous and develop himself around the DJ X brand and the choices that guided his route.

"Courage is resistance to fear, the dominion of fear, not the absence of fear."

*Mark Twain*

### **What accomplishes us as human beings?**

Daniel Pink is a reference in the world of management and behavior. He has caught the attention of academics and others interested in human behavior with the theories he has published in his New York Times bestsellers.

What truly motivates us? What gives us the energy and strength to work towards a purpose? And finally, what accomplishes us as human beings?

Let’s look at this theme in the context of 21st century Europe. If we went back in time 40 or 50 years, or left the Western structure of social organization, we might need to consider other premises.




Daniel Pink realized that traditional theories of motivation, job satisfaction and personal fulfillment did not explain the phenomena of creativity, or the development of work that might not be remunerated accordingly. He dedicated himself to the socio-professional observation of groups of highly committed individuals, comparing them with disinterested equivalents. He concluded that it is necessary to increase people's satisfaction in carrying out their professional tasks.

In this way, people want to conduct their activities with the purpose of personal fulfillment, with the realization of the activities as the main goal, rather than money or other extrinsic rewards. Achieving that goal is the basis and the engine of motivation, Pink considers.

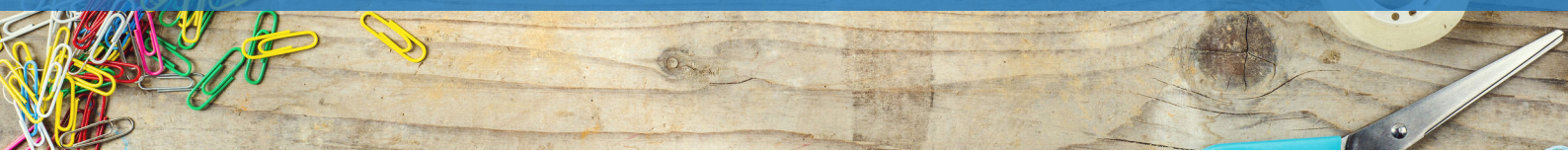
But as we know, talking is easier than doing. So, all things considered, how can this motivation be instilled in people?

Pink presents several answers, all of which revolve around the ability to self-motivate and excel, when we find the profession that truly drives us. We will see a little more of this theory in the next article.



Francisco found his way. He started from a comfortable situation, then moved into unknown territory. That's how it "turned out." Self-discovery was what led him to understand where he would have to go in order to find his destiny: that of his personal life and his social role - his profession.

It was all worth it. Today, Francisco is what he wanted to be: he creates his own music, is ever-aware of trends, travels through the places that matter in his domain and can consider himself professionally accomplished. He achieved the objectives for self-fulfilment by designing his own life.





## About Amrop

With offices in all world regions, Amrop is a trusted advisor in Executive Search, Board and Leadership Services. Amrop advises the world's most dynamic organizations on finding and positioning Leaders For What's Next: top talent, adept at working across borders in markets around the world.

Amrop's mission: shaping sustainable success through inspiring leaders.