Play Your Way to Career Development

A Facilitator's Guide for
Making Growth Fun Again

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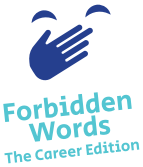	GAME 2 Forbidden Words: The Career Edition	5
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Why Play?

Play has a remarkable way of changing how we think.

It lowers our defenses, sparks curiosity, invites creativity, and helps us see familiar things from fresh perspectives. That's why some of our best ideas arrive not when we're trying hardest, but when we're exploring, experimenting, laughing a little, or simply looking at a challenge in a different way.

Career development deserves more of that.

Career development is too important to keep making heavy.

After all, few things have a greater impact on our work lives than the opportunity to learn, grow, and imagine what's possible next. The conversations we have about our future matter. The choices we make matter. But that doesn't mean the experience has to feel heavy.

In fact, a little lightness can make those conversations more meaningful.

When people feel relaxed and engaged, they're more likely to think expansively, consider new possibilities, and have honest conversations about what they want and where they hope to grow. Play doesn't diminish the importance of career development—it creates the conditions where better ideas and deeper conversations can emerge.

That's the spirit behind this guide.

Inside you'll find seven games or activities designed to make career development more engaging, more approachable, and more enjoyable. They're easy to facilitate, require little preparation, and can be used independently or as a springboard for richer career conversations between managers and employees.

Because career development is serious business. It just doesn't always have to feel so serious.

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How to Use This Guide

Who It's For

This guide is built for HR, talent development, and learning & development professionals, as well as people leaders who want to bring career development into everyday team moments—not just annual review cycles.

Your License

This is an organizational facilitator license, not a single-use personal copy. Within your organization, you may:

- Reproduce and share these facilitation instructions as many times as you like
- Use every game with as many teams, departments, or cohorts as you like, indefinitely
- Adapt session length and format to fit team meetings, onboarding, coaching conversations, or leadership offsites

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Running a Full Session

All seven games could be combined in a half- to full-day workshop or team offsite module. Alternately, each game also stands alone and can be a rich addition to existing training or meetings.

A Few Facilitation Tips

- Review each game's "Why It Works" section before you run it—the framing matters as much as the mechanics.
- Resist the urge to over-explain. Let people play first and make sense of it in the debrief.
- The debrief is where the real development conversation happens—don't rush it, even if it means running fewer games in a session.
- These games work well in mixed-level groups. Cross-level conversation is a feature, not a risk.

A Note on Game Names

Several games in this guide are original activities similar in style to popular games whose names are trademarks of their respective owners (credited where relevant). This guide and its content are original works, independently created, and are not affiliated with, sponsored by, or endorsed by the owners of those trademarks.

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GAME 1

Two Truths and a Stretch

WHY IT WORKS

Most introductions focus on what's already true about us—our roles, experience, and accomplishments. But career development is really about what's not true yet. This activity flips the classic icebreaker so the group practices naming a stretch out loud—something not yet true, but possible with intention and experimentation.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- **Materials:** None—just people and conversation
- **Group size:** Unlimited
- **Time:** ~15 minutes or more depending upon small group size

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HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

1. Form groups of 4-5 participants each.
2. Each person privately identifies two true statements about their career and one "stretch"—something they'd like to grow into that isn't true yet.
3. Going around the group, each person shares all three statements without indicating which is which.
4. The group guesses which statement is the stretch.
5. After the guess, the person introducing themselves shares one small step they could take to move that stretch from aspiration to action.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- Was the stretch easier or harder to guess than you expected? What does that tell you?
- What did this remind you about how career growth actually starts?

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GAME 2

Forbidden Words: The Career Edition

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Forbidden Words
The Career Edition
The Words We Use — and the Ones That Limit Us

WHY IT WORKS

Career development has its own vocabulary—promotion, feedback, engagement, networking—and that vocabulary can calcify into cliché, narrowing how people think about their own growth. Describing these ideas without the obvious words forces new language, and new language tends to surface new possibilities.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- **Materials:** Forbidden Words card set (one 10-card set for every six participants, provided here)
- **Group size:** Unlimited, two teams of 3 participants compete against each other
- **Time:** 15–20 minutes

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

1. Form groups of 3 or more.
2. One player from Team 1 draws a card and tries to get their team members to say the main word by describing it—without using any of the five "forbidden" words listed on the card.
3. Set a timer (60 seconds works well).
4. Award a point if the team members guess correctly before time runs out.
5. Allow Team 2 to take their turn by going through steps 1-3 with a new card.
6. Repeat the process, going back and forth between the teams, rotating the describing role so everyone gets a turn.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- Which words were hardest to describe without the obvious language?
- What did you notice about how we normally talk about careers?
- Which concepts felt narrower or more rigid than they need to be?
- How might expanding these definitions open up new development possibilities? (Try this with SUCCESS: if these are the only words we associate with it, no wonder career development can feel limited!)

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GAME 3

Stack & Reflect

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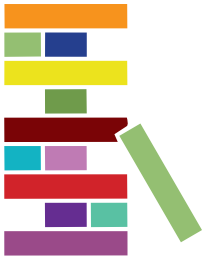

WHY IT WORKS

Careers are built the same way a stacking-block tower is—experience by experience, relationship by relationship, skill by skill, insight by insight, and question by question. Like the tower, careers need ongoing attention and adjustment to stay strong and balanced. And, like the tower, they will eventually wobble. The goal isn't preventing that—it's noticing quickly, learning, and rebuilding.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- **Materials:** A stacking-block tower game (such as Jenga®) with questions written on or affixed to the blocks (question list provided separately in the Appendix)
- **Group size:** Any size, played in turn
- **Time:** 20–30 minutes

SETUP

Before the session, label blocks with the questions provided here. Write directly on blocks or affix small, printed labels.

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

1. Players take turns pulling a block from the tower.
2. The player reads the question on the block aloud and answers it briefly.
3. They then place the block back on top of the tower, just as in standard Jenga®.
4. Continue until the tower falls.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What caused the tower to fall—a weak spot, the wrong block, instability, a risk that finally caught up? Those same dynamics show up in careers: missing feedback, neglected relationships, outdated skills, or simply not paying attention to what needs strengthening.
- The fall isn't failure—it's data. What did this round reveal about where your own foundation could use attention?
- The key isn't preventing the tower from falling. It's how quickly you notice, learn, and rebuild. Where might that apply in your career right now?

OPTIONAL PART 2

If time permits, participants can brainstorm some of the qualities, traits, or behaviors of effective career developers. They write these words on labels or adhesive notes, attaching one to each block and discussing why it's important. The group can then put the blocks together in a new structure, one that may be sturdier and more sustainable.

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GAME 4

Fill It Forward

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WHY IT WORKS

Career development tools are often long, serious, and a little intimidating. But growth doesn't require a ten-page worksheet or an hour of solitary reflection. Borrowing a familiar fill-in-the-blank format creates a fast, low-stakes way to surface real insight.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- **Materials:** Fill It Forward template and pens (template provided here)
- **Group size:** Individual or pairs
- **Time:** ~10 minutes (not including individual sharing)

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

1. Distribute one Fill It Forward template to each participant and allow them to complete it solo by following the prompts in parentheses as a guide for each blank.
2. Once complete, volunteers can read their result aloud if desired.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What surprised you about what showed up in your Fill It Forward Form? (People often discover something they hadn't fully articulated before given the novel framing.)
- How did the playful format change your willingness to reflect or share?
- Where might a tool like this be useful elsewhere in your organization—team meetings, coaching conversations, workshops, onboarding?

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GAME 5

Opportunity Quest

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WHY IT WORKS

Many people approach development with the same small set of moves on repeat: take a course, find a mentor, attend a workshop. This card-based game shakes people out of those ruts by generating fresh ideas for cultivating the experience and growth people are looking for.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- **Materials:** 1 set of Multidimensional Career Cards per group (provided separately)
- Chips or other tokens (one per participant)
- **Group size:** Groups of 3–8
- **Time:** ~30-60 minutes

SETUP

Distribute one set of Multidimensional Career Cards, instructing participants to separate the cards as they'll only be using the blue-bordered strategy cards. Have each participant prepare their current career focus using the Fill It Forward form in Game 4 or an internal tool that clarifies what the person's current development interests and goals might be.

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

1. Each group selects someone to shuffle and deal 4 blue-bordered Multidimensional Career cards to each player.
2. Dealer goes first, reading their Fill It Forward form (or other tool) and expanding as necessary (maximum of 30-60 seconds).
3. Players take turns playing their most appropriate card face-up, sharing why and how they'd recommend implementing it (beginning with person to dealer's left.) Sometimes players won't have a great match, so creativity is allowed.
4. The person whose career is on the table selects the best response, explains why, and gives the chip to the winner.
5. Players pick another card, so they have four at all times.
6. Teams rotate and repeat until everyone has a turn to tap the wisdom of the group.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What did this activity reveal about how easily we fall into the same development patterns?
- How did hearing others' ideas expand the ways you might act on your development insight?
- What's one idea you might actually experiment with after this session?

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GAME 6

Would You Rather?

WHY IT WORKS

Career development isn't only about gaining skills or finding opportunities—it's about understanding what matters most to you. Those priorities often only become clear when you're forced to choose. This game uses simple forced-choice prompts to surface the preferences, tradeoffs, and values that shape real career decisions.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- **Materials:** Would You Rather card set (one 10-card set for each pair or small group, provided here)
- **Group size:** Unlimited when the group is divided into pairs or small groups
- **Time:** ~15 minutes

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

1. Shuffle the card set and place it face-down in the center of the group.
2. Participants take turns drawing a card and reading both options aloud.
3. Each person chooses 'which they would rather' and briefly explains why.
4. Remind the group: there are no right answers, only different priorities.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What insights did you gain about yourself or your relationship with your career from this experience?
- As you chose, what pulled you in one direction or another?
- Where did your choices differ from the people around you—and what might that reveal about what you each value?

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GAME 7

Leadership Development Bingo

WHY IT WORKS

Career and leadership development are often treated as something that only happens inside formal programs or structured plans. In reality, thought growth usually comes from much smaller actions—things people try, conversations they start, challenges they take on, questions they ask. This Bingo card reframes development as a personal challenge rather than a group game, with a menu of low-lift moves anyone can experiment with over time.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- **Materials:** Leadership Bingo card, one per participant (provided here)
- **Group size:** Individual, played over time
- **Time:** Ongoing—distribute at the end of a workshop, group meeting, or one-on-one as a take-home challenge

SETUP

Distribute one card per participant. This is not played together in real time. Rather, it's a personal challenge participants complete on their own schedule.

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

1. Participants choose a few squares that intrigue them and experiment with those actions over the coming weeks.
2. Participants mark off squares as they complete them and see how many they can accomplish over time—aiming for five squares, a full row, or the whole card.
3. Follow up periodically to check on progress.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- The goal isn't completion—it's momentum. Revisit individually or as a group after a few weeks: which squares did people gravitate toward, and what did they notice?

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Keep the Momentum Going!

These seven games illustrate a simple but important truth: career development doesn't have to be heavy to be meaningful. With the right prompts and a bit of play, leaders and teams can spark powerful conversations, generate new ideas for growth, and build momentum—without lengthy plans or complicated processes.

Maybe the future of career development isn't heavier processes—but lighter play.

Ready to Go Deeper?

Encourage your people to discover their own unique development priorities with the Multidimensional Career Self-Assessment, available at juliewinklegiulioni.com.

Questions about facilitating these games, bringing a live workshop to your organization, or licensing additional copies of this guide? Reach out!

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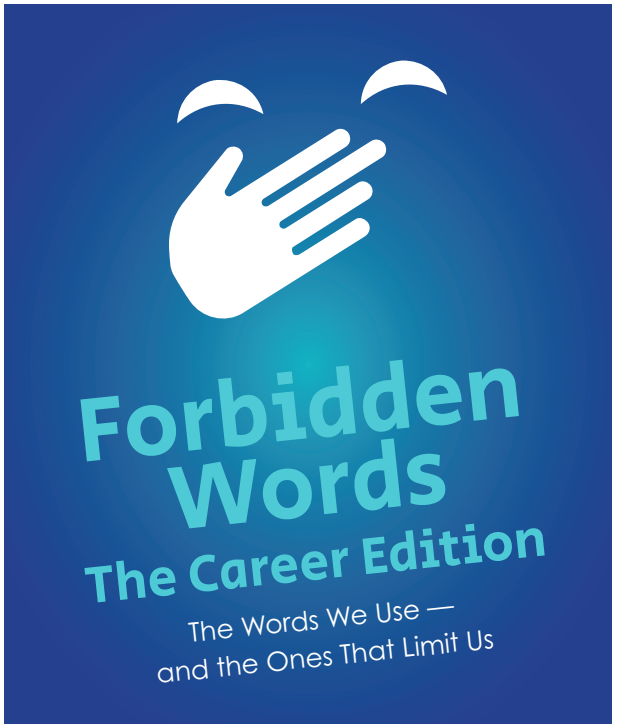
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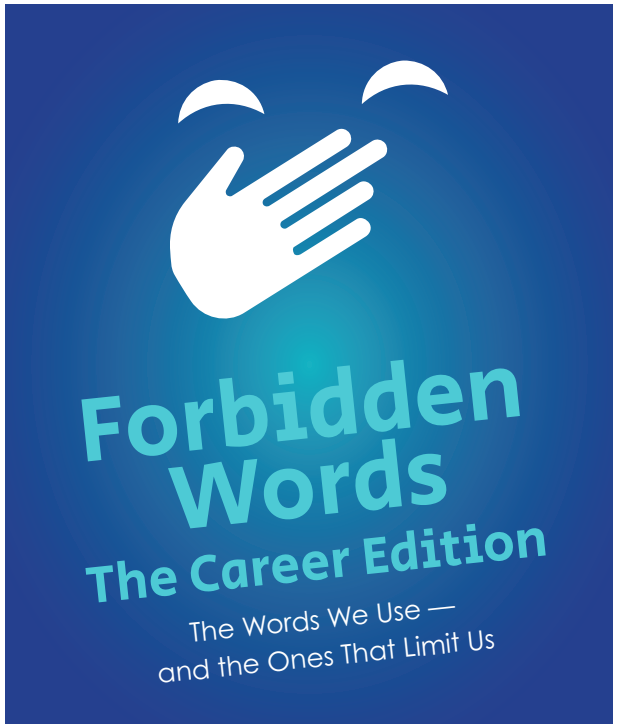
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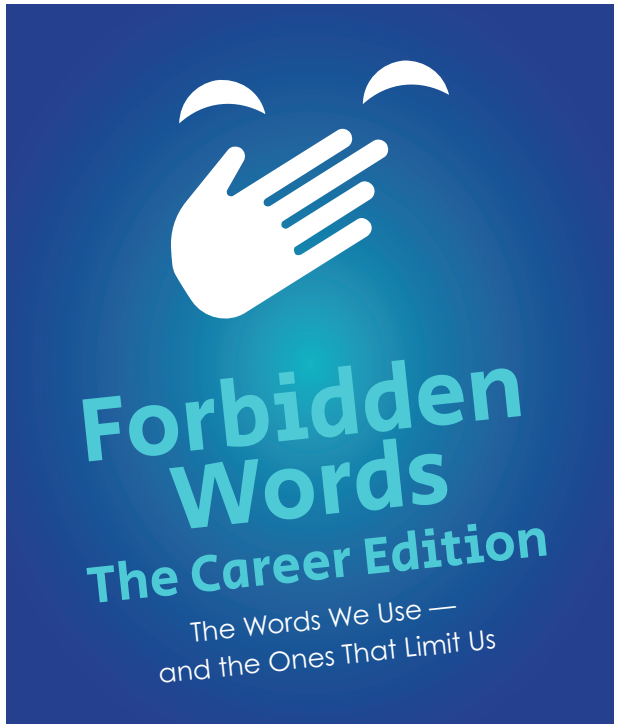
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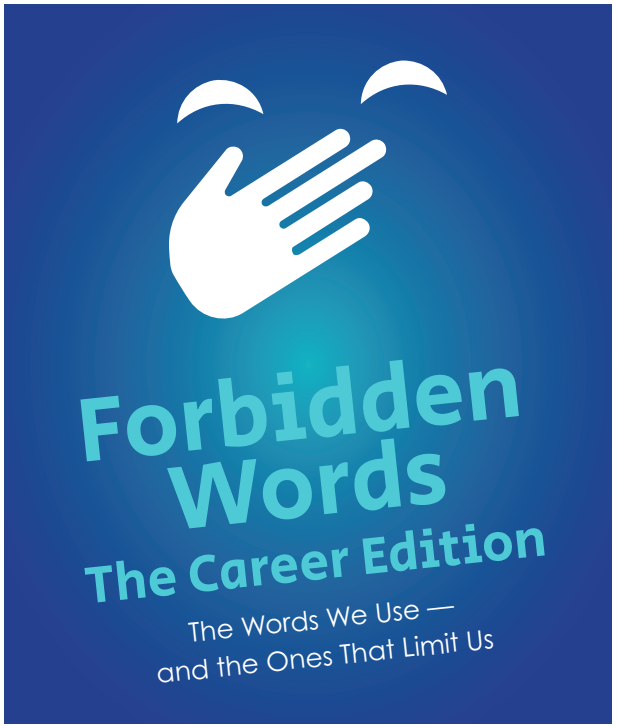
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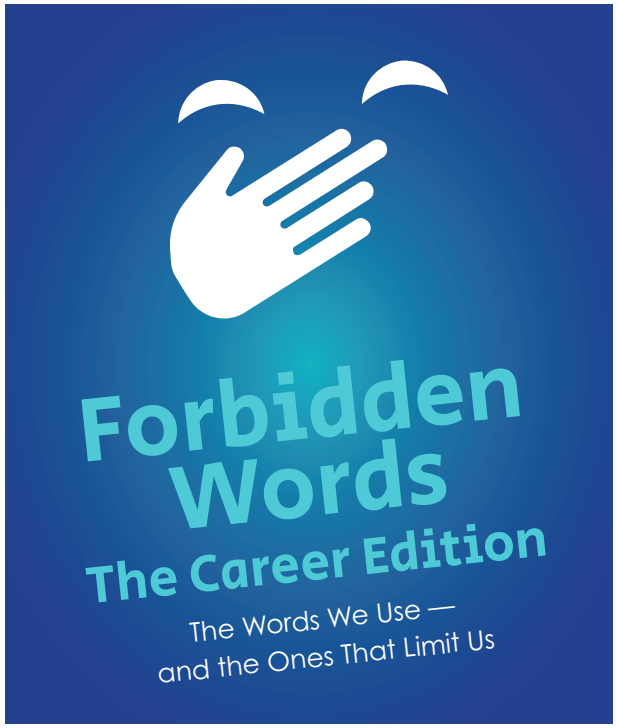
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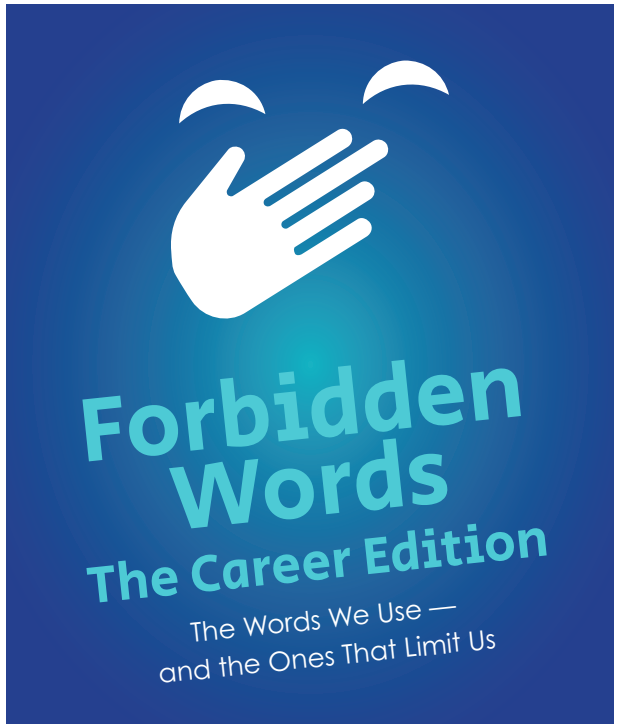
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PROMOTION

FORBIDDEN WORDS

RAISE

TITLE

UP

MANAGER

NEXT LEVEL

FEEDBACK

FORBIDDEN WORDS

PERFORMANCE REVIEW

IMPROVEMENT

ADVICE

CRITICISM

EVALUATION

ENGAGEMENT

FORBIDDEN WORDS

MOTIVATION

COMMITMENT

ENTHUSIASM

ENERGY

SATISFACTION

DEVELOPMENT

FORBIDDEN WORDS

GROWTH

LEARNING

SKILLS

TRAINING

IMPROVEMENT

NETWORK

FORBIDDEN WORDS

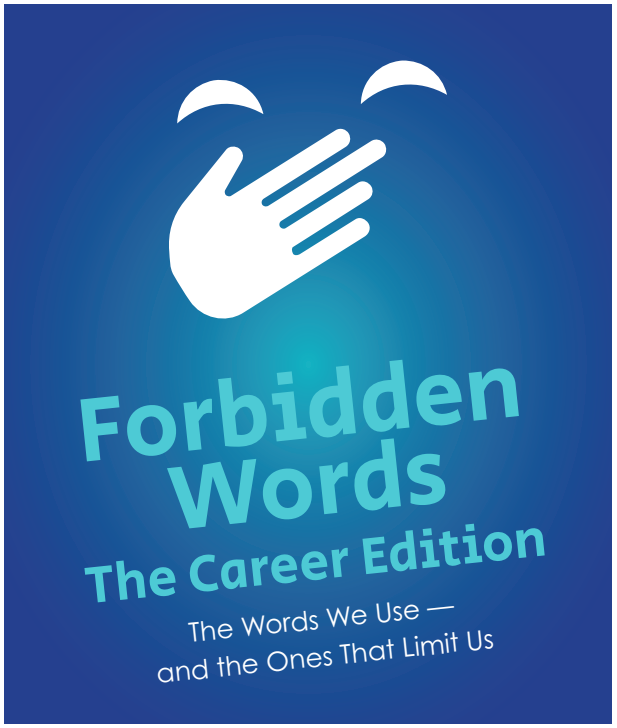
LINKEDIN

CONTACTS

CONNECTIONS

RELATIONSHIPS

PEOPLE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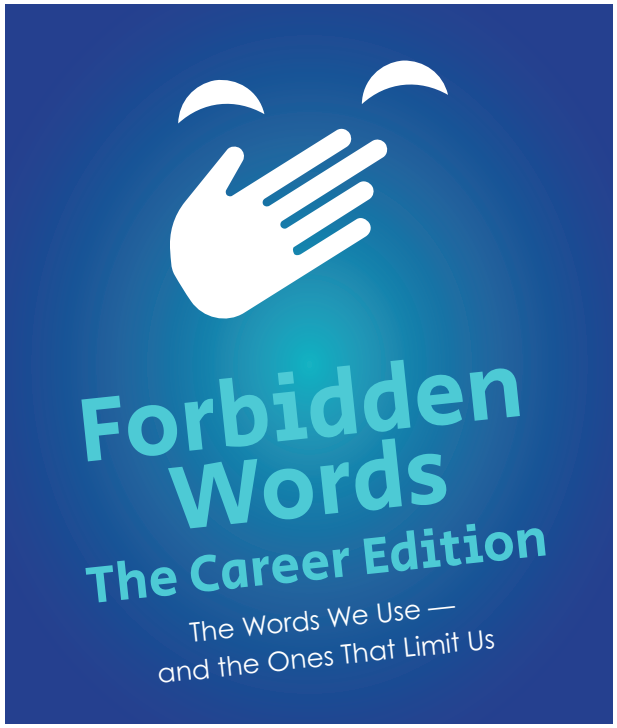
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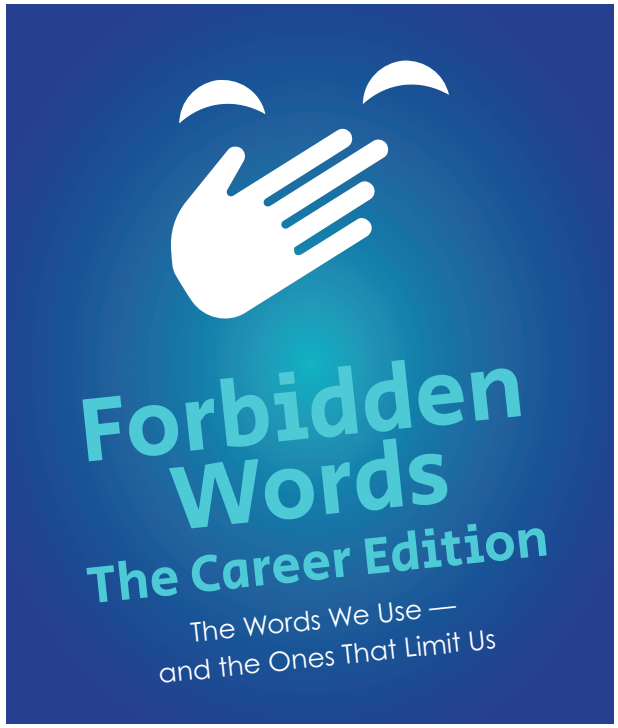
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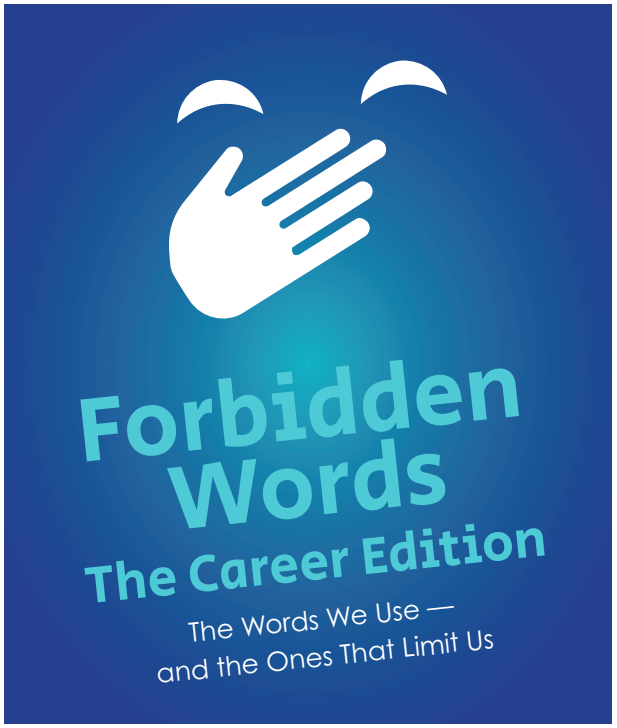
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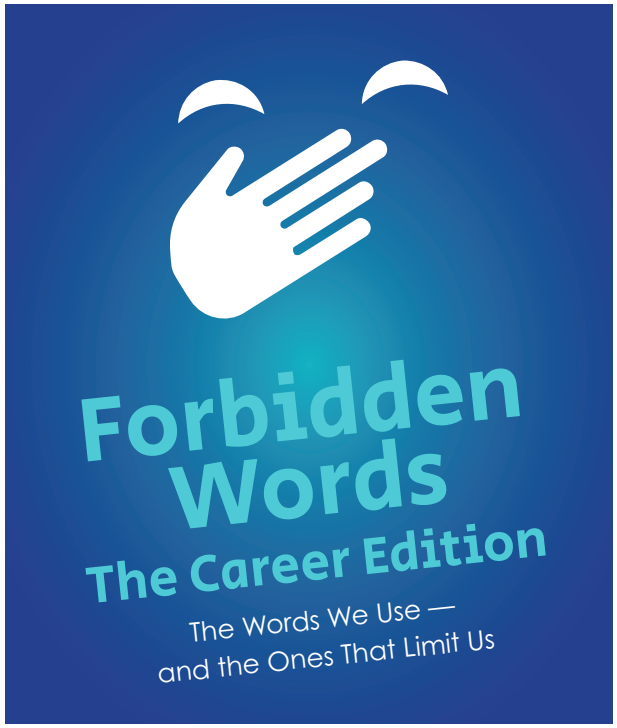
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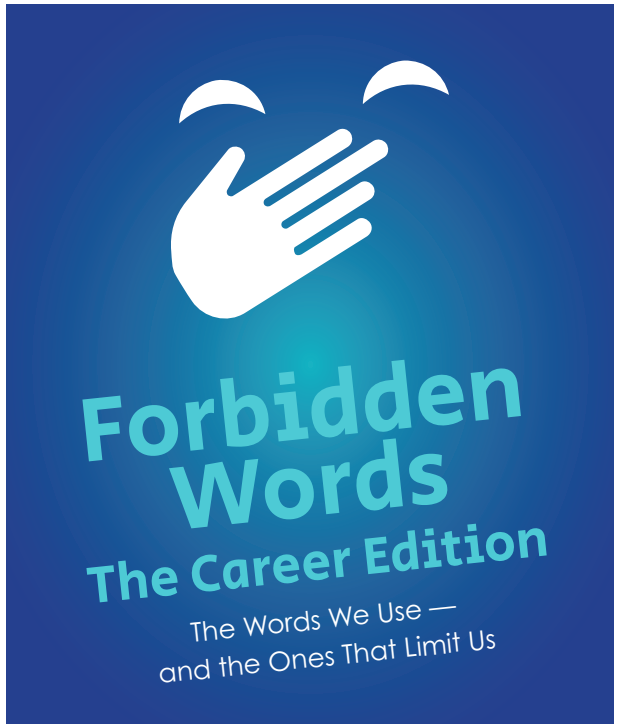
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SUPPORT

FORBIDDEN WORDS

HELP

MANAGER

RESOURCES

ASSISTANCE

GUIDANCE

CAREER PLAN

FORBIDDEN WORDS

GOALS

FUTURE

PATH

STRATEGY

ROADMAP

OPPORTUNITY

FORBIDDEN WORDS

CHANCE

OPENING

JOB

ROLE

PROMOTION

MENTOR

FORBIDDEN WORDS

ADVICE

COACH

GUIDE

EXPERIENCE

SENIOR

SUCCESS

FORBIDDEN WORDS

MONEY

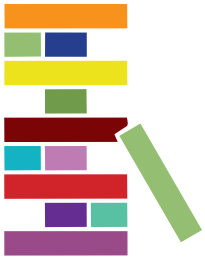
PROMOTION

TITLE

ACHIEVEMENT

GOALS

Stack & Reflect Questions



What are you known for?

What makes you unique?

What's the greatest value you bring to your work?

What do you excel at with very little effort?

What can your coworkers always count on you for?

What's something you're better at than most people?

What part of your experience has been most valuable to you?

What have you always been naturally good at?

What has always been most important to you in your work?

What personal values must be honored for you to feel satisfied at work?

What issues or problems do you care most strongly about?

When do you feel most alive at work?

What excites you about the profession you're in?

What do you most enjoy learning about?

What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?

What have you always wanted to try?

What tasks drain your energy the most?

What kind of work do you tend to avoid?

What work leaves you feeling bored or disengaged?

What aspect of past jobs have you loved most?

What kind of working relationships bring out your best?

What lesson do you keep learning over and over again?

How do your strengths sometimes work against you?

When were you last in "flow" at work—what were you doing?

What change in your field will most affect your work in the next few years?

What new skills will be most valuable in the future?

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What trends are reshaping how work gets done?

What tools or technologies will become essential in your field?

What industry shifts should professionals be paying attention to?

What changes in the world might affect your career path?

What will it take to stay relevant in your profession?

What's something in your field that people are underestimating right now?

What capability will matter more in five years than it does today?

What new opportunity might be emerging in your field?

What skill will become non-negotiable for success?

What would you most regret not trying?

What opportunity for growth exists in your current role right now?

What one change could have the greatest impact on your success?

What skills will you need to reach your goals?

What experiences would best prepare you for the future?

What can you do in your current role to position yourself for what's next?

What part of your current job would you like to expand?

If you could design the perfect assignment, what would it be?

What learning opportunity interests you most right now?

What would make your work feel more fulfilling?

What lesson from your past could guide your future?

What are you willing to invest to reach your goals?

What skill could open the most doors for you?

What experience would stretch you the most right now?

What goal feels worth pursuing even if it's difficult?

What action could you take this month to move forward?

What's one development experiment you could try?

Who could help you grow faster?

What could you start doing today that your future self would thank you for?

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FILL IT FORWARD

Your Development "Fill-in-the Blanks"

Right now, I'm _____.
(Current situation, conditions, and/or role)

And I'm _____.
(Feelings)

My growth focus is to _____ + _____.
(Verb) (Details)

So I can _____.
(Describe your desired experience, how you want to feel, your enhanced relationship with your work– examples include: contribution, competence, contentment, confidence, challenge, connection, choice)

And reach my goal of _____.
(You name it!)

Additional essential information:

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And reach my goal of _____.
(You name it!)

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WOULD YOU
RATHER?

WOULD YOU
RATHER?

WOULD YOU
RATHER?

WOULD YOU
RATHER?

WOULD YOU RATHER…

Become a deep expert in one area

OR

Develop a broad range of skills across many areas

WOULD YOU RATHER…

Take on a high-visibility project with risk

OR

Take on a stable role where you can steadily improve

WOULD YOU RATHER…

Work for a great manager

OR

Work on fascinating projects

WOULD YOU RATHER…

Receive frequent feedback

OR

Have a high degree of autonomy

WOULD YOU
RATHER?

WOULD YOU
RATHER?

WOULD YOU
RATHER?

WOULD YOU
RATHER?

WOULD YOU RATHER…

Take on a stretch assignment outside your comfort zone

OR

Deepen mastery in something you already do well

WOULD YOU RATHER…

Have strong relationships with colleagues

OR

Have significant influence over decisions

WOULD YOU RATHER…

Be known as reliable and dependable

OR

Be known as innovative and bold

WOULD YOU RATHER…

Learn through formal training

OR

Learn through challenging experiences

WOULD YOU
RATHER?

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WOULD YOU
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WOULD YOU RATHER…

Work in a role that plays to your strengths

OR

Work in a role that builds new capabilities

WOULD YOU RATHER…

Have clear direction and expectations

OR

Have freedom to figure things out your own way

WOULD YOU RATHER…

WOULD YOU RATHER…

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT BINGO

☐ Read a leadership blog in your backyard	☐ Reflected on a recent mistake — and what it taught you	☐ Revisited a classic leadership book	☐ Skimmed an article on emotional intelligence	☐ Had a mentoring coffee chat
☐ Jotted down your leadership "why"	☐ Read about feedback while sipping something cold	☐ Took a walk while listening to a leadership podcast	☐ Gave someone unexpected recognition	☐ Forwarded an insightful post to your team
☐ Blocked time for focused, uninterrupted thinking	☐ Captured a leadership lesson in your journal	☐ Julie wg julie winkle giulioni	☐ Reframed a complaint into a coaching moment	☐ Let someone else lead the meeting
☐ Asked a team member about their development goals	☐ Heard something in a podcast you want to try	☐ Encouraged someone who's stuck in a rut	☐ Set a small goal for your own growth this month	☐ Gave feedback that helped someone grow
☐ Practiced patience in a stressful moment	☐ Started your day with intentional gratitude	☐ Connected two people who should know each other	☐ Asked a curious question that opened up dialogue	☐ Let go of needing all the answers

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