

# REFLECTIONS ON CAREER



## A Less Recognisable Career

There was a time when careers followed a recognisable path. You left school, went to university or learned a trade, and built a working life that often remained within the same lane for decades.

Less than twenty years ago, my own study explored those pathways. Even then, I was examining careers shaped in a different era. Today, that sense of continuity feels less certain.

It was once common to ask a question that hardly needed finishing. "What do you do?" The answer, more often than not, became part of a person's identity.

In my case, the answer has rarely been singular. At different points I might have said professional golfer, coach, business owner, educator, volunteer, administrator, academic, or mentor. Often it was a combination. The common thread was sport, in particular golf, but the path itself was anything but linear.

We are surrounded by competing advice. Do not become a one-trick pony. Stay in your lane. Be a specialist. Be adaptable. It raises a simple question: what is a career now? Is it still a defined path, or a series of roles that only make sense in hindsight?

When I speak to younger people, I tend to offer similar advice. Build breadth early. Be curious. Develop a base of skills that travel well: communication, critical thinking, practical competence, the ability to work with others, and to think strategically. These skills endure, even as the environment around them changes.

Much of this thinking was present during my own development, and was reinforced by a friend, Duncan Weir, who spent almost his entire working life within one organisation. I was grateful for his willingness to share what he had learned. His advice was simple, and, in my view, useful.

### **Think in ink**

He encouraged his team to write things down when solving a problem. As Duncan put it, "There is something about putting pen to paper that sharpens thought. One idea leads to another. What begins as a short list often grows, not immediately, but steadily. In a world that favours speed and "digital tools", the act of writing forces a pause, and with it comes a little more clarity."

### **Incremental improvement**

Small gains, made consistently, tend to outperform bursts of effort. Duncan put it simply, "Progress is rarely dramatic, but cumulative." He advised, "Focus on what can be improved, however slightly, and let those improvements compound over time."

### **Play your way in**

When starting a new role, Duncan likened it to a Test cricket batsman building an innings. "Take time to understand the environment. Watch, listen, and learn. Culture reveals itself gradually. Only once you understand it can you begin to shape it. Otherwise, it will shape you." That observation alone repays the time taken to read this.

Duncan spoke from experience. As a young graduate, he joined a team where most colleagues were nearing the end of their careers. It gave him space to learn, to make mistakes, and to observe. Over time, those observations allowed him to contribute more meaningfully, and eventually to influence the culture for those who followed.

### **Make mistakes, but do not repeat them**

Mistakes are part of progress. Avoiding them entirely usually means you are not stretching yourself. What matters is recognising them, learning from them, and moving forward with better judgement.

None of this is complex. That is perhaps the point.

At a time when careers feel less defined and the pace of change continues to accelerate, there remains value in simple, well-grounded thinking. Not as a rigid plan, but as something to return to when the path ahead is not entirely clear.

## **A Moment To Reflect**

Can you apply any of Duncan's reflections to your own career? Perhaps start by committing your thoughts to paper and see what comes to life on the page.

The old adage that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step supports Duncan's thinking on incremental progress. The idea of getting 1% better has grown in popularity for good reason. So what is one thing you could do today that moves you a little closer to your future self?

For me, the most valuable of Duncan's thoughts was the reminder that culture reveals itself gradually. It is worth sitting with that one.

And finally, go ahead and make some mistakes. Missteps are part of the process. We all make them. What matters is that you learn from them, and find yourself a little nearer to a better outcome next time.

Tony Bennett (based on the thoughts of Duncan Weir)

15.03.2026