

GAME READY MINDSET™



The Journey Line

What Your Past Can Teach You
About What's Next



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The people described in worked examples (Dana, Marcus, Ruth) are composites created for illustration. Any resemblance to a specific person is coincidental.

This book is for education and self-reflection. It is not a substitute for professional advice.

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Contents

Prologue: Never Too Late.....	4
Part One: The Discovery	7
Chapter 1. The Question Nobody Asks You.....	8
Chapter 2. My Own Line.....	10
Chapter 3. Energy Is Evidence.....	15
Chapter 4. Why a Line?.....	17
Chapter 5. Why This Works (and Where It Doesn't).....	19
Part Two: Draw the Line	21
Chapter 6. Before You Begin.....	22
Chapter 7. Find the Highs.....	25
Chapter 8. Find the Lows.....	27
Chapter 9. Read the Line.....	29
Part Three: Turn the Pattern Into a Life	31
Chapter 10. Name Your Themes.....	32
Chapter 11. Mark the Ceiling, Draft the Pivot.....	35
Chapter 12. Use the Decision Checker.....	37
Chapter 13. When Your Themes Fight.....	40
Chapter 14. Build a Portfolio.....	42
Part Four: Put It Into Practice	45
Chapter 15. Three People, Three Journeys.....	46
Chapter 16. Athletes and the Journey Line.....	49
Chapter 17. Keep Drawing the Line.....	51
Epilogue: Why I Needed This Too.....	53
Appendix A: Your Journey Line Worksheets.....	54
Appendix B: A Starter List of Themes.....	59
Appendix C: A Short Reading List.....	60
About the Author.....	61
Draw It Online.....	62

Prologue: Never Too Late

My mom, Joan, started sailing in her fifties. I always called her Mother Nature.

She named her boat *Never Too Late*.

She had the name before she had the boat. She said it out loud, the way you say something you've already decided. "I will name my boat *Never Too Late*, because I want to start sailing soon."

I've thought about that for years. It isn't advice, exactly. Nobody was asking her for advice. It was more like a dare she made to herself, and then kept.

I think about her name for that boat whenever someone tells me they're too old, too specialized, too far down one road to try something else. Too late to switch careers. Too late to start the hobby. Too late to say yes to the project that keeps nagging at them.

I'm in my sixties. I started a company this year. In my twenties I moved overseas. At forty I learned to snowboard, and I mean really learned: a full week on the mountain until it finally clicked. I've never been good at waiting. Apparently that's a pattern, and a good one to have, because I spent a lot of my career not noticing it.

Here's what I want to say plainly before we start. *Never too late* doesn't mean never hard. You may have a mortgage. You may have kids, or parents, or health insurance you can't afford to lose. Those are real, and we'll deal with them in this book, honestly. But "it's

too late” is usually not a fact. It’s a story. And stories can be checked against evidence.

You already own that evidence. It’s your own life.

This book is about how to read it.

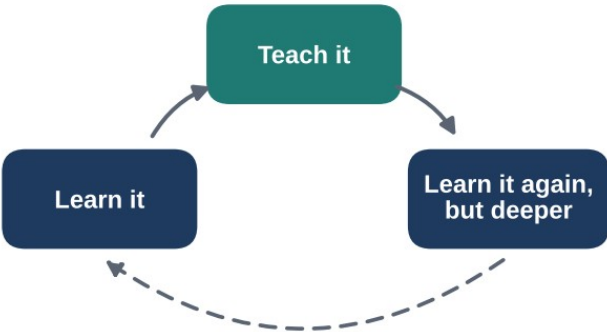
Where I learned it

I didn’t invent the Journey Line. I learned it from the leaders I worked with at Intuit.

They had a philosophy I’ve never forgotten: **learn, teach, learn.** When you learn something, you teach it to someone else, and teaching it deepens what you learned. Then you go back and learn it again, better, because teaching shows you what you didn’t understand yet. It sounds simple. It changed how I work.

I’ve worked at a lot of great companies, and many were among the top software companies in the world. Intuit was the only one that consistently tried to build leaders. Not just promote them. Build them. The Journey Line is one of the things I took from that.

So this book is me doing what they taught me. I learned the line, I’ve used it for years, and now I’m teaching it to you. If it works, the next step is yours: teach it to someone else.



Teaching shows you what you didn't understand yet.

Learn, teach, learn.

Part One

The Discovery

Chapter 1

The Question Nobody Asks You

Ask a room of adults what they do, and every hand goes up. Ask them what energizes them, and the room goes quiet.

It's not that people don't know. It's that nobody asks, so nobody puts the answer together. The knowledge sits in pieces: a project that flew by, a job that felt like wearing someone else's coat, a Saturday you'd happily live again.

Pieces are not a picture.

Think about how most of us make big decisions. We ask what's hiring and what pays. We ask what our degree qualifies us for. We ask our parents and our friends and our LinkedIn feeds. We ask every question except the one with decades of evidence behind it: *when have I been most alive, and what was I doing?*

By the time you're thirty or forty or sixty, you've run thousands of experiments on yourself. You've been in rooms that lit you up and rooms that drained you. That data exists. It's just scattered, never collected, never read. **Your past is the most underused database you own.**

The Journey Line is how you collect it. You pick an age range and mark five to ten moments when you felt fully alive, and five to ten when you felt drained. Each gets a title and an age. You plot them, highs above a center line and lows below, and you look at the shape of your own life. Then you name the themes that keep showing up.

Then you use them: to mark where your current path has hit a ceiling, to draft what's next, and to test real decisions before you make them.

That's the whole exercise. It takes an evening. It can change what you do with the next ten years.



The whole book on one line. Each step feeds the next.

One more thing about how to read this. It works best as a workbook. At the end of most chapters there's a short **Your Turn** box. Do it before you read on. The full worksheets are in Appendix A, and there's a free digital version at journeyline.grmsports.com with no account and no password. Your answers stay in your browser unless you choose to save or share them. A notebook works fine too. So does a napkin.

Chapter 2

My Own Line

I should tell you how I got here, because I didn't start with a clever exercise. I started with a ceiling.

My favorite book is the *Odyssey*. I know how that sounds, but I mean it, and it turns out to be useful, because the book has a shape I recognize: you leave the world you know, you hit things you didn't expect, you find new ways forward, and only late do you understand what you were actually traveling toward. I'll use three words for that shape in this chapter. Departure. Initiation. Return.

Departure

My early jobs were about building community online, before anybody had a job description for it. At AOL I worked on the main service and the internet properties, and as a product manager I helped monetize WebCrawler and GNN, two of the biggest websites of their day. At Borders I built the company's first internet business from scratch (books, music, video), and then more than 200 individual store sites that broadcast local events and built community around them. At Intuit, content people wanted more of, so I launched a skunk works project to build community, and it was eventually rated a top community by the *Wall Street Journal*.

I'm not listing that to impress you. I'm listing it because I want you to see what I couldn't see yet: I was doing versions of the same thing in three different places.

Initiation

Then I hit the ceiling.

I'd gotten very good at community. We won awards for it; I took home the customer marketing manager award four years in a row. And I couldn't see a path from community manager to the kind of leadership role I wanted. Community was valuable and it wasn't valued, at least not at the level of the C-suite. I worked at some of the best software companies in the world, and the ceiling was there at the top of the industry too. You can't outwork a structure.

The lesson was simple and annoying. **Specialization can become a ceiling.** The better you get at one thing, the more the world hands you that one thing.

At Marketo, and then after the Adobe acquisition, I came to a fork. I could stay in the lane I knew, or I could move toward something that didn't have a name yet. I'll tell you the part that doesn't make good speeches: I stayed. I had a family to support. I liked the work. The paycheck and the health insurance mattered. Staying wasn't a failure of nerve. It was an adult decision.

But staying didn't mean I stopped looking. I'd noticed three things. Business was moving to digital in a big way. Customer support was structurally broken. And the math of hiring a fresh wave of people for every product launch didn't work. Put those together and you get something that had no clean name in 2016. We started calling it Digital Self-Serve, Success, and Scale. Nobody handed me that idea. I spotted the friction myself, then taught myself what I needed to learn. Nobody had written the job, so I wrote it.

Then AI showed up, and the ground moved again. The pivot had to pivot. That's the part nobody tells you about reinvention. It isn't a single leap to a safe harbor. It's a habit you keep practicing, ready or not.

The line

By then I'd been doing something every year, a practice I'd picked up from the leaders at Intuit: a journey line, my career as a timeline, with highs, lows, and the moments that changed direction. It isn't therapy and it isn't a vision board. It's a plain, repeatable way to look at the shape of a career instead of just living inside it.

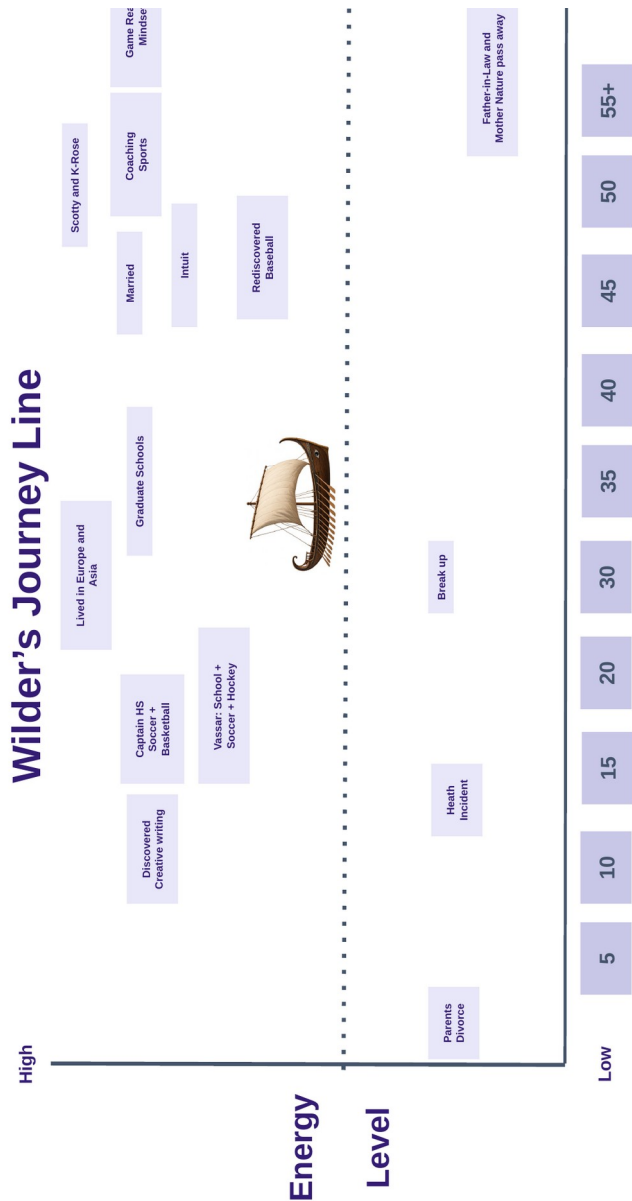
The last one I drew before I started the company pointed at something specific: build a retirement career starting in 2029, once both kids were in college. Patient. Responsible. Sequenced.

Then I did what I'd been telling other people to do. I looked at the whole line, not just the career part, and I looked at it differently. When I first built it, I was hunting for career opportunities. That's not what jumped out.

Sports kept showing up. Coaching kept showing up. Teaching kept showing up. Working with people kept showing up.

I'd been following those threads my entire life without noticing.

My own Journey Line. Turn the book a quarter turn clockwise. Highs above the dotted line, lows below, age along the bottom. Some of those lows are private, and I've left them on the line anyway.



Look at the top half. Captain of the high school soccer and basketball teams. Vassar for school and soccer and hockey. Living in Europe and Asia. Graduate school. Coaching sports. And at the far right, Game Ready Mindset. Sports is in nearly every high. People are in nearly every high. The lows are a different story, and I'll keep most of that one to myself for now, but they're there, and they matter, and you'll draw yours too.

Return

So I gave myself permission to wait until 2029. Then I realized there was no good reason to.

I started Game Ready Mindset in February 2026. It isn't sitting on a shelf. It runs in parallel with the day job, not instead of it. I remember sitting at my son's baseball game, watching a kid strike out and crumble, and realizing the tools I'd used to reinvent my own career were exactly what he needed too. That was the day it stopped being a someday plan.

I now work with high school and college athletes and teams on the mental side of performance: how to respond to a mistake, how to handle pressure, how to be ready for the next play. I wanted to stop moving pixels on a page and start empowering players on the field.

I've reinvented myself twice. The first time, inside technology, answered *how do I stay relevant?* The second answered a different question: *what actually gives me energy?* The second one went deeper.

I'd call my mom's boat the third.

Your turn. Before you read another page, finish this sentence on paper: "If I stopped waiting, I'd start ____." Don't defend it and don't fix it. Just write it down and keep it somewhere you'll find it later.

Chapter 3

Energy Is Evidence

We measure our working lives in achievement: promotions, salaries, awards, headcount. Achievement is real, and I'm not here to dismiss it. But it's a poor compass, because it measures what the world thought of your work, not what the work did to you.

Energy is the better signal. By energy I don't mean caffeine or being a morning person. I mean time disappearing. The meeting you didn't want to end. The problem you turned over in the shower. The Saturday project that felt like play even though, described to a stranger, it sounded like work. And the opposite: the Sunday-night dread, the task you postpone for the third week, the success that felt like nothing when it arrived.

Psychologists call the high end of this *flow*, a term from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who spent decades studying what people were doing when they felt most absorbed. You don't need the vocabulary. You've felt it. The question is whether you've ever written down *when*.

Why I trust it more than success

You can talk yourself into believing a job was a great opportunity because it looked good on paper. Titles blur and dates slip and the story gets edited. The feeling tends to stick around. A sixty-year-old can often tell you exactly how it felt to run the school play at seventeen, and exactly how it felt to sit through budget reviews at forty-five.

I want to be careful here, though. Memory is imperfect and moods color what we recall. I'm not claiming your body keeps a flawless ledger. I'm claiming that how something *felt* is better evidence than how it looked, and that it's evidence you rarely look at.

Here's another reason. Skill tells you what you *can* do. Energy tells you what you might want to keep doing. They overlap but they're not the same list. Plenty of people are good at things that drain them, and the world keeps handing them more.

Evidence, not a verdict

This next point matters more than anything else in the chapter, so I'll say it directly. **If it energizes you, that doesn't mean you should do more of it.**

Some things that give you a charge are terrible for you. Adrenaline. Conflict. Risk. Winning. Proving someone wrong. Working until two in the morning. These can feel exactly like aliveness and cost you a great deal.

So when you read your line, ask four questions about what lit you up:

- **Energy.** What activated me?
- **Meaning.** Did it matter to me?
- **Sustainability.** Could I live this way for years?
- **Values.** What do I want this energy used for?

Energy is where the evidence starts. It's never the whole decision.

Chapter 4

Why a Line?

You could make a list. Lists are fine. But a list hides the two things a line shows: **shape** and **time**.

Shape first. When highs and lows are plotted against a center line, you see how high your highs run, how low your lows go, and where they cluster. Some people find their whole adult life sits below the line, with every high tucked away in school. Some find a flat, gray twenties and then a line that climbs at thirty-two and stays climbed. Others see a zigzag of burnout and recovery they'd never named. A list gives you items. A line gives you a shape.

Time second. Every moment needs an age, and ages force honesty. "I love teaching" is an opinion. "I felt most alive at twenty-four running the training, at thirty-one coaching the team, and at thirty-eight leading the workshop" is a pattern with timestamps. One good summer is an anecdote. The same thing at twenty, thirty, and forty-five is a signature.

There's a quieter reason too: a line is a story, and we understand stories. When you see your life as a shape with a direction instead of a pile of unrelated jobs, something shifts. People who finish the exercise often say some version of the same sentence: *I've never seen my life like that before*. That sentence is the product.

What it isn't

A Journey Line isn't a performance review, and nobody grades it. It isn't a diagnosis. And it isn't a prediction, because **your past**

doesn't predict your future. It gives you evidence for designing it. That's a smaller claim than "your past knows your future," and it's a more honest one.

It also isn't precise. You'll be guessing at ages and rounding off moments. That's fine. You're looking for the shape, not the decimal points.

Chapter 5

Why This Works (and Where It Doesn't)

I'm not a researcher, and this isn't a research paper. But the ideas under the Journey Line aren't mine alone, and a few are worth knowing.

Flow. Csikszentmihalyi found that people describe their best moments as absorbed effort, not rest. They were stretched and focused and not watching themselves. So when you're picking highs, look for times you were *doing* something.

Memory and peaks. Daniel Kahneman and colleagues found that we tend to judge an experience by its most intense moment and by how it ended, not by the average of every minute. Your memory has already filtered your life down to peaks and valleys. The exercise just collects them. The moments that keep resurfacing are resurfacing for a reason.

Narrative identity. Psychologist Dan McAdams studies the story each of us carries about who we are and how we got here. That story isn't just a record. It guides what we do next. A line turns scattered events into a story with a direction.

Designing your life. Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, in *Designing Your Life*, suggest tracking which activities energize you and which drain you, then building more of what works. Their method looks forward, week by week. The Journey Line looks back, decade by decade. They work well together.

The limits

None of this proves a Journey Line will reveal your perfect career. No exercise can. Memory is imperfect. The best thing in your future may not be anywhere in your past, because you haven't tried it yet. The fair claim is smaller, and I think stronger: **a structured look at how you've felt over time is better evidence than a gut feeling, a quiz, or a trend report.** It's a place to start. It's never a verdict.

The books behind these ideas are in Appendix C if you'd like to go deeper.

Part Two

Draw the Line

Chapter 6

Before You Begin

You're about to do something most people never do: treat your own life as evidence. A few things first.

You need an hour or two, which you can split across evenings. You need a way to write things down. And you need honesty, which is the only ingredient that really matters.

Pick your range

Decide where your map starts. Most people begin around ten or twelve, when they first remember choosing how to spend their time. If your early memories are thin, begin where they get rich. Your map ends today.

Don't skip childhood. Kids don't have a career yet, so their energy shows up unfiltered. What you did for hours at nine, without being told to, is some of the cleanest data you'll ever have.

Five rules

Choose by feeling, not by how impressive it looks. Write the first honest answer and refine later. Don't compare yourself to anyone. Approximate ages are fine. And nothing is too small, silly, or embarrassing. If it gave you energy, it belongs.

A five-minute warm-up

Answer these in a line each, without overthinking. What did you do as a kid for hours without being asked? What was your favorite subject, and what exactly did you love about it? What job or role did you almost not want to leave? What do people say you “come alive” doing? What have you dreaded for years?

Some of those answers will turn into your first moments.

About the hard parts

Some of your lows may touch painful things: a loss, a breakup, a firing, a hard year. You decide how deep to go. You can skip a memory or note it in three words and move on. If this exercise stirs up more than you can comfortably carry, stop, and talk to a counselor or someone you trust. This is meant to be useful, not to hurt.

HIGH ENERGY: put your highs here

5

3

your center line

3

5

LOW ENERGY: put your lows here

Age on each line:

Your blank line. Highs go above the dotted line, lows below. Rate each from 1 (mild) to 5 (a peak). Copy it, trace it, or draw your own.

Your turn. Write down your age range and the five warm-up answers. Worksheets 1 and 2 in Appendix A have room.

Chapter 7

Find the Highs

The heart of the exercise is five to ten high-energy moments. It sounds easy. It isn't, because the first moments people reach for are the impressive ones: the promotion, the graduation, the award. Sometimes those belong on the line. Often they don't.

The instruction that unlocks everything is this: choose by how it *felt*, not how it *looked*. The question isn't "What am I proud of?" It's **"When did time disappear?"**

Other ways in. When did you look up and realize hours had passed? What have you done for free, or would have? What do people thank you for, again and again? What moment do you still think about, uninvited, years later?

All of those point at activity, not outcome. The gold in your past is almost never the trophy. It's what you were doing in the hour *before* the trophy.

Zoom in

When you find a high, don't stop at the headline. Say you wrote "Won the regional sales award." What were you actually doing that felt good? Was it the winning? The relationships with the clients? The puzzle of figuring out what each person needed? The work with the teammate who helped? Same award, three completely different themes. You won't know until you zoom in.

Titles and ages

Give each moment a short, specific title and an age. Vague titles make vague themes. “Good year at work” tells you nothing. “Built the training from scratch” tells you a lot. “Fun summer” is useless; “Coached the under-12s” is something you can use. The age matters too, because it forces honesty, and later it lets you see time. A guess is fine.

Then give each moment an energy rating from one to five. A moment that makes you smile just remembering it is a five. One that was pleasantly absorbing is a three.

Traps

The trophy trap: picking something because it looks good. The recency trap: overweighting the last two years because they’re easy to remember. The “should” trap: including a wedding or graduation because it *should* have been a high, when it was mostly logistics. The humble trap: leaving out something small or silly. Some of the best themes hide in small moments. And the one-era trap: pulling everything from a single period. Spread them out if you can.

Aim for five to ten. Fewer than five and no patterns show. More than ten and the line gets crowded with things that were merely nice.

Your turn. Write five to ten highs, each with a title, an age, an energy rating, and one line on what you were actually *doing*. Then read them out loud. If a title makes your chest feel lighter, you chose well. Worksheet 3 is waiting.

Chapter 8

Find the Lows

Nobody enjoys this part. Do it anyway.

Your lows are the filter that keeps your future honest. A decision can be full of your highs and still be wrong if it's also full of your drains. The entrepreneur who loves building and hates selling doesn't have a motivation problem. She has a theme problem, and only the lows reveal it.

The quiet ones

Choose by feeling, not by drama. A death, a divorce, a layoff may be the hardest moments of your life, and you can put them on the line if you want. But the lows that carry the most information are often the long gray stretches: the role where every task felt like wading, the project you were good at and couldn't stand, the environment that made you smaller, the year you did everything right and felt nothing.

People forget those, and they shape the biggest decisions.

Ask what drained you

A low has a reason, and the reason is the theme. "The startup year" might be a low because of the chaos, or the isolation, or the constant selling. Those are three different lessons that point three different ways.

Try finishing this sentence for each low: *"This was draining because I had to _____ and I never got to _____."* That second

blank is the gold. It's often the mirror image of one of your highs. Someone energized by teaching may be drained by writing reports no one reads. Someone energized by building may be drained by endless meetings about what to build.

Also ask whether it was the work or the setting. The same task on a supportive team, with a good manager, might have been a high. Split it in two: would I have liked this work somewhere better? Would I have disliked this place even doing work I love? The answers keep you from blaming the wrong thing.

Aim for five to ten, roughly matching your highs, and rate each from one (mildly draining) to five (a deep low). One last thing: nothing on this list is a failure. A low doesn't mean you did something wrong. It means you learned something.

Your turn. Write five to ten lows with a title, an age, a drain rating, and the sentence above completed. Worksheet 4.

Chapter 9

Read the Line

Now you have a chart: highs above the center, lows below, spread across the years. Before you touch themes, just look at it. Print it, or lean back from the screen. Five minutes of honest looking teaches most people something.

Clusters. Do your highs bunch up in one era? If most are before thirty, that isn't nostalgia. It's information. What was true about that era? The people, the freedom, the pace, the kind of work? Do the same with lows.

Gaps. A long flat stretch might mean nothing lit you up. It might also mean you were busy raising kids and paying the mortgage, or you weren't asked the right question, or memory is playing tricks. Treat a gap as a question, not a verdict.

The recent past. When was your last real high? If it was years ago, that's worth knowing. It doesn't mean something's wrong with you. It may mean the current chapter isn't feeding you.

The ratio. Many highs and some lows is normal. A line that lives mostly below center suggests the current chapter, not your whole life, may be misaligned. The line shows chapters, and chapters can change.

Surprises. A job you thought you liked sits below center. A short unglamorous project is your highest peak. Surprises are the most valuable things on the page, because they're where your assumptions about yourself and your actual experience come apart.

When I read my own line, the surprise was how much of it was sports, and how little of it was technology. I'd expected the reverse.

Don't rush into themes. The looking is where the truth lands. The themes are where it becomes useful. If you feel something while you look, relief or sadness or a small spark, stay there for a minute and write down what it is.

Your turn. Answer in a sentence each: What's the biggest thing I notice? What surprises me? Where do my highs cluster, and what do those years share? When was my last real high? Worksheet 5.

Part Three

Turn the Pattern Into a Life

Chapter 10

Name Your Themes

This is where the exercise becomes a tool.

A **theme** is a short, plain name for an activity that keeps showing up in your highs. Not the setting. The activity. Suppose three of your highs are “Coached the under-12s,” “Ran onboarding at work,” and “Taught my neighbor to code.” A field, an office, and a kitchen table. Underneath, you’re helping someone get better at something. You might call that **Teaching others**. “Built the deck,” “Renovated the kitchen,” and “Launched the site in a weekend” might be **Making things**.

A few rules.

Use verbs. “Teaching” is a theme. “Education” is an industry. Verbs travel; nouns stay put.

Name them yourself. A theme handed to you is information. A theme you name is recognition. If “Craftsmanship” feels too fancy, write “Getting my hands dirty.” The right name is the one that makes you nod.

Three to six. Fewer is a blur. More is a list.

At least two moments each. One moment is an event. Two or more across years is a theme. If something only shows up once, put it aside as an experiment to try, not a pattern to build on.

Check the lows. If a theme shows up there too, handle it with care. Competing energizes some people weekly and exhausts them daily. You may love it in small doses and hate it as a daily diet.

Dana

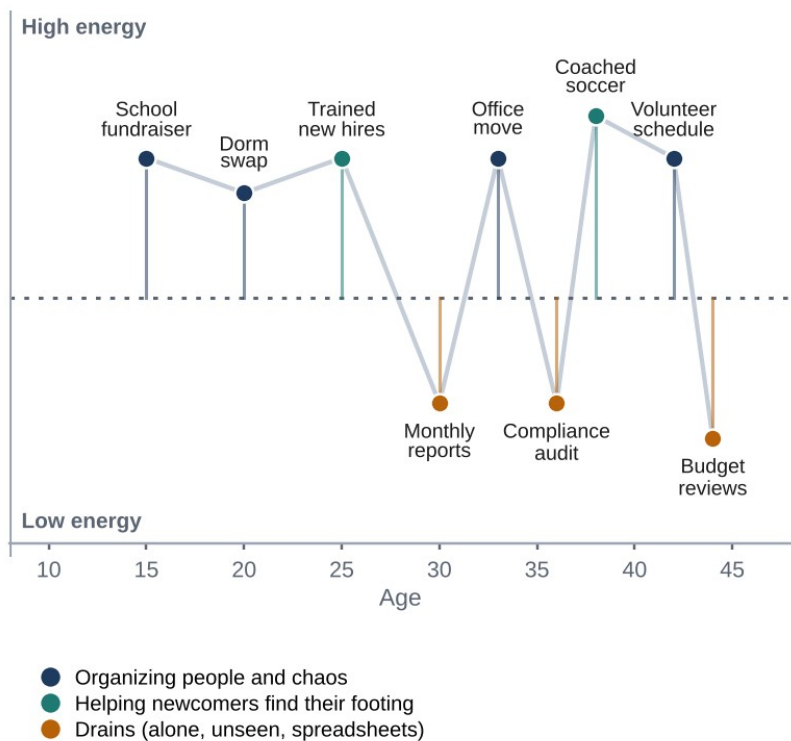
Here's a composite, so you can see it work. Dana is forty-six, works in operations, and feels like she's coasting. Her highs: running a school fundraiser at fifteen, organizing her dorm's move-out swap at twenty, training new hires at twenty-five, leading an office relocation at thirty-three, coaching her son's soccer team at thirty-eight, building a food bank volunteer schedule at forty-two. She thought they had nothing in common.

Then she wrote the activity under each. Organizing people around a goal. Showing newcomers how things work. Two themes:

Organizing people and chaos into something that works, and Helping newcomers find their footing.

Her lows were a year of monthly reporting, a compliance audit, and two years of budget reviews. She wrote: "All of these had me alone in a spreadsheet, doing something nobody could see." Mirror image of her highs, which were visible, social, and hands-on.

Dana didn't need a new career. She needed more of two things in her week.



Dana's line (a composite). The dots are colored by theme. Her highs share two themes, and her lows share one kind of drain.

If your themes feel too obvious, that's fine. For many people the real result is permission. You may have known for years that you love teaching and never took it seriously because it didn't fit the career story. Seeing it across decades makes it hard to dismiss. If they feel scattered, go back and ask what you were doing hour by hour, add a few early-life moments, and look at *how* you worked as well as what: alone or with others, with a deadline or without, in front of an audience or behind the scenes.

Your turn. Write the activity under each high. Group the ones that match. Name each group with a verb phrase. Keep three to six, each with at least two moments. Then check them against your lows. Worksheet 6, and Appendix B has a starter list if you get stuck.

Chapter 11

Mark the Ceiling, Draft the Pivot

Your line has two jobs. It shows you what energizes you. It also shows you where you're stuck.

Most of us don't see a ceiling while we're under it. We just feel a slow flattening. Here's the three-step version I use, and it's the one I walk rooms through when I give talks.

1. Draw your line. Chart the actual highs and plateaus of your career so far. Plateaus matter as much as peaks.

2. Mark the ceiling. Find the place where specialization is starting to trap you. This is the point where the better you get, the narrower your options become. For me it was community. I was good at it and it was valued, and it wasn't valued where I needed it to be. Where is it for you? You'll know. It's the part of your line where the energy goes quiet but the praise keeps coming.

3. Draft the pivot. Write down what you actually want your career to look like. Not what you assume it has to look like based on your current title.

That last sentence is the whole exercise. I want you to read it twice.

Titles are sneaky. If you're a "senior analyst," your imagination quietly starts offering you the jobs that senior analysts get. The pivot isn't a new title. It's the work. In 2016, nobody had a job called Digital Self-Serve, Success, and Scale. I didn't need the title to exist. I needed to move toward the work.

You don't need the perfect answer

Yogi Berra supposedly said, “If there’s a fork in the road, take it.” It’s a nonsense sentence, and that’s why it works. You don’t get to stand at the fork weighing it forever. At some point you move.

Don’t aim for the ultimate answer. Aim to get started. The world keeps shifting, so keep moving, and when you reach a fork, pick one. A draft pivot is a draft. You can change it next year.

Your turn. Mark your ceiling on your line. Then write one paragraph, in plain words, about what you actually want your work to look like. No titles allowed. Worksheet 7.

Chapter 12

Use the Decision Checker

A list of themes is interesting. A list of themes applied to a real decision is useful.

The Decision Checker takes a choice you're facing, like the Denver job, the consultancy, retiring now, going back to school, and asks one question per theme: **would this give me more of that theme, or less of it, in an ordinary week?** You vote *more*, *no change*, or *less*.

Three details carry nearly all the weight.

“Ordinary week.” Not launch week, not the honeymoon, not the interview where everyone's on their best behavior. Decisions are lived on ordinary Wednesdays. Picture one. What are you doing at 10 a.m.? At 2 p.m.? Who are you talking to? Are any of your themes in the room?

“More or less,” not “yes or no.” Real decisions aren't good or bad. They're trades. Naming the trade is the insight.

Each theme votes separately. The count gives you a verdict (strong fit, mixed fit, leans away), but the count isn't the point. The point is the one theme you care about most that's pulling away. That's the conversation you need to have.

“Leans away” isn't an order to say no. It's a question: *can I get this theme somewhere else?*

Marcus

Another composite. Marcus is thirty-nine and has been offered a management role. His themes: solving hard technical problems, teaching and mentoring, working in a small close team, and uninterrupted time to focus. He voted *less* on technical problems, *more* on mentoring, *no change* on the team, and *less* on focus time. Mixed fit.

Both themes pulling away were ones he cared about deeply. So he asked whether he could get them somewhere else, and took a better question to his boss: not “should I say yes?” but “can I keep one day a week hands-on, and can I protect my mornings?” They built a version of the role that kept part of what he loved.

The checker didn’t tell Marcus what to do. It told him what to ask for.

An ordinary Wednesday: Marcus weighs the management role

	Less	Same	More
Solving hard technical problems	−		
Teaching and mentoring			+
Working in a small, close team		=	
Uninterrupted time to focus	−		

Verdict: mixed fit.

The real question: can he get those two themes somewhere else?

Marcus’s votes (a composite). Count the votes, then look at the one theme you’d hate to lose.

If the verdict surprises you, pause. Maybe you’re excited about something your themes don’t capture, like money or status or

freedom. Say so out loud. Maybe you're excited about the idea of the thing and not the week. Or maybe your themes are incomplete. The checker answers one question well, which is what this does to your energy. It doesn't answer every question.

Your turn. Pick one real decision. Picture an ordinary Wednesday. Vote on each theme and write one sentence on why. Worksheet 8.

Chapter 13

When Your Themes Fight

Here's what the neat version of this exercise leaves out. Your themes won't always agree.

Suppose your themes are teaching, freedom, competing, building, and family. A job might give you teaching and building and quietly destroy freedom and family. That isn't the Decision Checker failing. That's the checker working. Real life is a trade between sources of energy, and the point is to see the trade clearly, not to pretend it away.

The hard versions are the ones people actually live. What if the thing that energizes you doesn't pay? What if your family needs something different from what you want? What if you love competing and you're not good enough to make it a career? What if your biggest high was twenty years ago, and the door to it has closed? What if your line shows you something you didn't want to see?

I won't tidy these up for you. Some don't resolve. But there are moves that help.

Rank them, honestly. Not every theme weighs the same right now. Which one would you grieve losing? Start there.

Sequence instead of choose. I wanted to work in sports mental performance for years, and I also had a family and a paycheck. I didn't have to pick. I stayed in tech and started Game Ready Mindset in parallel. It's not the clean story. It's a real one, and plenty of people live it.

Shrink it. A theme doesn't need a career to be fed. It needs a place. A weekend league can feed competing. A volunteer shift can feed helping.

Trade on purpose. If a decision costs you a theme, decide to pay that price with your eyes open, rather than discovering it in month six.

Let some of it hurt. Sometimes the honest answer is that a theme will live small for a while, or that a season of life asks for something else. That isn't failure. It's a choice you can make instead of one that gets made for you.

Run all of this through the four questions from earlier: energy, meaning, sustainability, values. A theme that scores high on energy and low on sustainability needs a different shape, not necessarily a bigger place in your week.

Your turn. Write down the two of your themes most likely to collide. What would it cost to feed both? Which one would you protect first, and why?

Chapter 14

Build a Portfolio

For most people, the answer isn't one big career change. It's a portfolio.

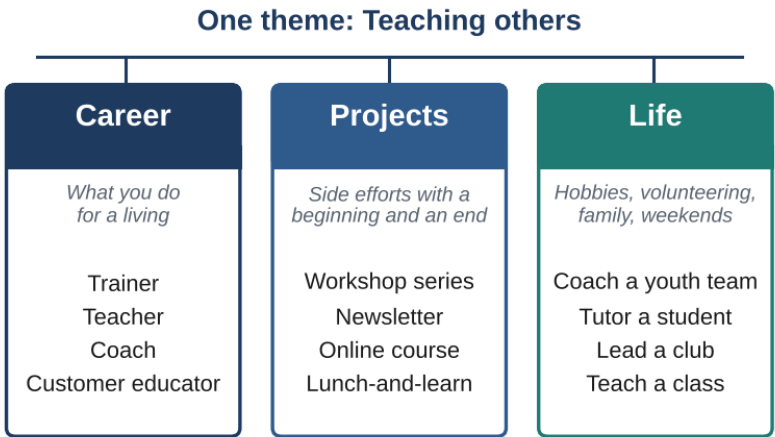
This is the idea I find myself repeating most, because it solves a problem with the usual “follow your passion” advice. That advice says find your one calling. I'd rather say: **build a life where your important themes have somewhere to live.**

I think of three places a theme can live. **Career:** what you do for a living. **Projects:** things you start on the side, with a beginning and an end. **Life:** hobbies, volunteering, family, the weekend. A healthy week has each of your themes in at least one of those. A job that carries two themes, a project that carries one, a hobby that carries the one the job starves.

Energy is a budget, and themes are how you spend it across a week, not just across a career.

One theme, many outfits

Take **Teaching others**. As a career it could be a trainer, teacher, coach, or customer education lead. As a project, a workshop series, a newsletter, a course, a lunch-and-learn at work. In life, coaching a youth team, tutoring, leading a club. Notice there's a range from big commitments to small ones, and you rarely need the biggest version to feel the benefit.



One theme, three places it can live.

Then combine. **Teaching + Making things** might be a woodworking instructor or a maker-space leader. **Competing + Bringing people together** might be a league organizer. Combinations are where the surprising ideas live.

Not everything has to pay

The goal isn't to monetize every theme. It's to make sure none of them gets starved. Plenty of people finish this exercise relieved by this one idea: *I don't have to turn my passion into a job. I just have to make room for it.*

Test before you leap

An idea isn't a plan. Talk to someone who does it and ask what an ordinary week looks like and what drains them. Try a small version: teach one workshop, volunteer one season. Check it against your lows. Run it through the checker. Then decide. You don't have to bet your life to learn whether something gives you energy.

Your turn. For each theme, write one place it could live in your career, one project, and one piece of your life. Worksheet 9. Then circle the smallest thing you could try in the next thirty days.

Part Four

Put It Into Practice

Chapter 15

Three People, Three Journeys

Dana and Marcus are composites, and so is the third person below. If one of them sounds familiar, that's the point. Let's watch each of them go from line to decision.

Dana: “I don’t hate my job. I just don’t feel anything.”

Dana drew her line and found her last real high was nine years ago. That stung. She named her two themes, and she saw plainly that her week had neither. The conflict was practical: she couldn't afford to quit, and she wasn't sure she wanted to. So she asked for something small. She volunteered to run orientation for the next group of new hires and to lead the office move. She tracked how each week felt for a month.

What she learned: one of those two themes came roaring back. The other turned out to matter less than she'd thought. She dropped it from her list. That's allowed. Themes can be wrong. You find out by testing.

Marcus: “I don’t know whether to take the promotion.”

Marcus's conflict was the one we saw: mentoring pulled him toward the job, technical work and focus time pulled him away. He didn't

resolve it by deciding. He resolved it by negotiating, and the negotiation only worked because he knew precisely what he was asking for.

Six months in, the hands-on day was the first thing his calendar tried to eat. He had to defend it every week. The role wasn't perfect. But he was making a trade with open eyes, and when it got hard he knew why.

Ruth: "I'm retiring. Now what?"

Ruth is sixty-three and leaving a forty-year career in hospital administration. Everyone asked what she'd do. She had a list of the usual: travel, golf, "maybe volunteer."

Her line went back to childhood. The highs weren't the career. They were fixing her dad's radio at eleven, running the church rummage sale at twenty-six, and teaching her granddaughter to knit last winter. Two themes: **Fixing things for people** and **Teaching with my hands**. The career had fed neither.

Her husband wanted to travel six months a year. That was the fight. Ruth didn't want to give up the trips and didn't want to lose the work either. They settled on three months away, and in the other months she joined a repair café, where neighbors bring in broken toasters and lamps, and started teaching a monthly knitting class at the library.

Was it a clean answer? No. Some months she wanted more travel, some months less. But she'd made her week out of her themes instead of out of a list of things retirees do, and when someone asked what she was up to, she had something true to say.

What they share

None of them found a calling. Each found a pattern, hit a real conflict, and made a trade. Dana restored a theme. Marcus negotiated for two. Ruth designed a week. And each of them took a small step before a big one.

My mom would have recognized that. She didn't get a perfect plan. She got a boat.

Chapter 16

Athletes and the Journey Line

I started noticing something in athletes that I'd seen in adults for years. They're good at the thing in front of them and often have no idea what gives them energy beyond the scoreboard.

Athletes get constant feedback on performance: stats, playing time, rankings, splits. They get almost none about what feels alive. Many can tell you their batting average and not what part of the game they'd play for free. And since a playing career is short, the day it ends can feel like a cliff. Athletes who know what energizes them beyond one sport land more softly.

I work with high school and college athletes and teams on the mental side of performance. In that work I use shared language. One piece is the **Weather Check**: Sunny, Cloudy, or Stormy. It's a quick honest way to say where you are right now. Another is the **ARC Reset**: Acknowledge, Release, Concentrate. It's a few seconds to turn one mistake back into one play instead of five.

The Journey Line works on a longer clock. The Weather Check is about today. The line is about climate. An athlete who knows their climate reads the weather better, and can see that one bad game is a dot on a long line, not the whole chart.

A twenty-minute version

For a young athlete: write five times you felt most alive, in sport or out of it. Write three times you felt most drained. Look at the highs and ask what you were doing. Competing? Helping a teammate? Figuring something out? Being part of something bigger? Name two themes. Then ask where else, besides your sport, you could do more of that.

It often surprises them.

For coaches and parents

Coaches can use it as a one-on-one conversation starter: ask a player to bring five high moments and tell you the story of one. You'll learn more in ten minutes than in a season of drills. It also helps with seniors about to leave the program. A reminder: the line belongs to the player. It's private. Nobody should be pushed to share a low they'd rather keep.

Parents, the same applies. You can invite and ask and listen. You can't decide for your kid what their highs were.

Chapter 17

Keep Drawing the Line

Your Journey Line isn't a diagnosis. It's a snapshot, and snapshots can be retaken.

Save yours and date it. Come back in a year, or after a big change, and draw it again. The changes between lines are as informative as any single one: a theme that fades, a new one that appears, a low that turns into a high when the environment changes. I do mine every year. It's how I noticed the sports thread, and it's how the 2029 plan turned into this year.

Good times to redraw: a birthday or the new year, after a job change or a move or a loss, when you feel flat for no clear reason, before a big decision. You don't have to start over. Pull out the last one, add what's happened, and ask whether the themes still hold.

Most of us treat self-knowledge as something you either have or you don't. I think it's closer to fitness. **Self-knowledge is something you maintain.** The line is the workout and the saved copies are the progress photos.

If you want a daily habit between lines, try this. At the end of each day, ask two questions: *What gave me energy today?* *What took it?* One line each. After a few weeks, your themes will show up in real time on ordinary Tuesdays.

What this can't do

A Journey Line can't guarantee a good decision. It can't tell you what's possible in the world, how much money you need, or what

the people you love need from you. It doesn't replace a mentor, a financial planner, or a counselor. What it can do is show you the one thing no one else can see: how your own life has felt from the inside, and hand you a way to bring that into every decision from here on.

Then do the last step, the one my Intuit mentors taught me: **learn, teach, learn.** Show your line to someone you trust. Walk them through the highs and the themes. You'll understand your own line better after you've explained it, and they might draw theirs.

The world keeps shifting. Keep moving.

Epilogue: Why I Needed This Too

I learned this exercise from some great leaders at Intuit, and I kept using it because I needed it myself.

For years I made decisions by looking forward: at markets, at opportunities, at what seemed impressive. It was late in the game before I thought to look backward at what had actually energized me. When I finally drew my line, I expected to see technology. What I saw was sports, coaching, teaching, and people. They'd been there the whole time, in the moments I kept returning to without being asked.

Yogi Berra's line is still my favorite: *If there's a fork in the road, take it.* Whatever you decide, the point isn't to get the decision perfect. It's to get moving.

Career planning is heavy stuff, so don't panic. Start small. Start with an evening, a pen, and your own life.

And if you ever catch yourself saying it's too late, think about a woman in her fifties who picked the name for her boat before she'd really begun to sail.

Never Too Late.

Thank you for reading. If we can help connect the dots from your past to what's next, let us know. The Journey Line is free at journeyline.grmsports.com. Let the fun begin.

Appendix A: Your Journey Line Worksheets

Copy these into a notebook, or print them. If you’d rather do it online, scan the code on the last page of this book.

Worksheet 1: Your range

My map starts at age _____ and ends at age (today) _____.

HIGH ENERGY: put your highs here

5

3

your center line

3

5

LOW ENERGY: put your lows here

Age on each line:

A blank line to copy or print.

Worksheet 2: Warm-up

- 1. What did I do for hours as a kid without being asked?
- 2. What was my favorite subject, and what exactly did I love about it?
- 3. What job or role did I almost not want to leave?
- 4. What do people say I “come alive” doing?
- 5. What have I dreaded for years?

Worksheet 3: My highs (five to ten)

#	Title (be specific)	Age	Energy 1-5	What was I doing?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

Worksheet 4: My lows (five to ten)

Finish for each: “This was draining because I had to _____ and never got to _____.”

#	Title (be specific)	Age	Drain 1-5	What drained me?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

Worksheet 5: Reading my line

- 1. The biggest thing I notice:
- 2. What surprises me:
- 3. Where my highs cluster, and what those years share:
- 4. Where my lows cluster, and what those years share:
- 5. My most recent real high:

Worksheet 6: My themes (three to six)

Theme (verb phrase)	Moments that belong to it (at least two)	In my lows too?

Theme (verb phrase)	Moments that belong to it (at least two)	In my lows too?

Worksheet 7: My ceiling and my pivot

1. Where on my line does specialization start to trap me?
2. What do I actually want my work to look like, with no title allowed?

Worksheet 8: Decision Checker

The decision I’m facing: _____

Picture an ordinary Wednesday.

Theme	More	No change	Less	Why

The one theme I care about most that is pulling away:

Can I get it somewhere else? How?

Worksheet 9: My portfolio

Theme	Career	Project	Life

My smallest experiment for the next thirty days:

I'll check in with myself on (date): _____

Appendix B: A Starter List of Themes

This is a spark, not a menu. Your themes should be in your own words.

Teaching others. Coaching someone toward a goal. Mentoring. Building with my hands. Making something from nothing. Solving hard problems. Figuring out how things work. Fixing what's broken. Organizing chaos. Bringing people together. Leading a team. Being part of a close team. Competing. Pushing my limits. Exploring new places. Learning something new. Performing. Telling stories. Writing. Making things beautiful. Helping someone through a rough spot. Listening. Persuading. Starting something new. Improving what already exists. Working alone, deeply. Working outdoors. Moving my body. Caring for people, animals, or plants. Digging for answers.

Appendix C: A Short Reading List

- **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. On absorbed, energized engagement.
- **Daniel Kahneman**, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. How memory and experience work, including the peak-end idea.
- **Dan McAdams**, *The Stories We Live By*. On narrative identity.
- **Bill Burnett and Dave Evans**, *Designing Your Life*. A practical guide, including the Good Time Journal.
- **Edward Deci and Richard Ryan**, *Self-Determination Theory*. On autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
- **Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane Dutton**, “Crafting a Job.” The original paper on job crafting.

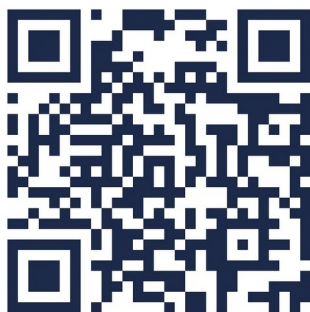
About the Author

Scott K. Wilder is the founder of Game Ready Mindset™, a program and platform for teams and athletic programs, working with players, position groups, and teams in baseball, soccer, softball, and volleyball. He holds a Master's from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (now Sofia University), a Master's in Business Administration from New York University, and a Master's in International Studies and Conflict Resolution from The Johns Hopkins University, with coaching credentials from Georgetown University, Brian Cain's MPM Program, the National Federation of High Schools, and FC Barcelona Football Club. He is the author of *Millennial Leaders* and the forthcoming book *Compete in Any Weather*.

Draw It Online

You've read the book. Now draw yours.

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It's free. There's no account and no password. Your answers stay in your browser unless you choose to save or share them.

Once you're there:

1. **Mark your highs and lows**, each with a title and an age.
2. **Look at your line**. Notice the shape first.
3. **Name your themes** in your own words, using verbs.
4. **Save it with the date**, and draw it again next year.
5. **Teach it to someone**. Learn, teach, learn.

Never too late.