

A woman with long, wavy brown hair is sitting in a large, light-colored wicker chair. She is wearing a striped sleeveless top and is smiling while looking off to the side. She is holding an open book in her lap and a pen in her right hand, appearing to be reading or writing. The background is a blurred indoor setting with other people and furniture.

# CAREER PATHS IN PUBLIC ACCOUNTING

Discover the career factors driving you.



# WHAT'S DRIVING YOU?

**The world of public accounting is a dynamic, fast-changing place—and filled with countless opportunities for CPAs.** There's always the traditional paths through accounting firms, especially the Big 4, but for many financial professionals, a "non-traditional" option might be more appealing. It all comes down to finding the path that leads to both professional and personal fulfillment.

**Many public accountants don't realize the sheer number of opportunities they have to build a fulfilling career outside of accounting firms.** CPAs and accountants at all levels can fill crucial roles in consulting, internal audit, SEC reporting, FP&A, private accounting, and recruiting. There are opportunities to make a notable difference while setting your own hours, choosing your own projects, and enjoying the stability and work-life balance you crave.

**So what's the next step?** If you're ready to pursue new career opportunities, you need to know what's driving you and what's most important to you in your career journey. Now is a great time to explore what's out there. Discovering the factors that matter most to you can help you make optimal choices. In this guide, we'll give you the tools you need to start thinking about your next step – and stay true to what's driving you.

Here's what to expect:

**REVIEW** | Understand trends in the world of work today.

**REFLECT** | Define what's really important to you.

**GO FOR IT** | Own your professional journey.





# LET'S REVIEW

## Trends in the world of work today . . . and tomorrow

If you're in the job market, the odds are pretty good that you're looking for more than compensation – although that's certainly a big consideration! Today's tax, audit, financial advisory, consulting, and risk advisory candidates are looking at the whole package: flexibility, work-life balance, opportunities for growth, overall job satisfaction, and more.

Over the past couple of years, employers discovered that their formerly office-bound teams could be just as productive – and often even more productive – [working from home](#). Unsurprisingly,

many employees discovered that they appreciate the flexibility and freedom that remote work affords them. Others have found that what they do on a daily basis, and the impact they make at work, matters more and more. **Sound familiar?**

If you're thinking about making a big career move, where you work, how you work, and the contributions you're making while you work may be just as important as your compensation package. Whether you're motivated by a remote or hybrid work opportunity, or your inner entrepreneur is calling, understanding your career drivers can help you make decisions that are right for you.

## Embracing change

The world of work has changed for good, and job-seekers are embracing it. There's even a name for it: employee experience (EX). The need to reimagine work is at the core of EX. Thanks to job seekers who are willing to articulate and advocate for their priorities, companies are realizing that "perks" of the past (e.g., office yoga, team happy hours, great snacks, and killer rec rooms) aren't the primary drivers of employee satisfaction and a positive company culture that they once were.

For many career changers, EX is tipping the scales from "it'll do" to "I can't wait to get started!" Professionals in all industries, at all levels of the organization, are looking for companies that offer a great EX. And companies that want to succeed in a hot job market are paying attention.

"People want to feel inspired, find meaning, and see the impact their work has on others. And when they do, they're more engaged, innovative, and productive" ([Harvard Business Review](#)). This sentiment is exactly what's driving the market and driving your professional trajectory – finding a career that offers a sense of purpose.

## Working with purpose

When people come to work with purpose, they're doing so because they feel their work has value, their voices are being heard, and that they're making an impact that matters. Given the new-found freedom of remote work and a heightened focus on social impact, jobseekers are looking for career opportunities that offer more than a paycheck; they want to feel like they are contributing to something bigger and more meaningful – that there's true purpose in their work. Sometimes, that means a career change into something unexpected.

This leads to another trend we're willing to bet takes on a life of its own: Jobseekers will no longer be bound to linear career paths; professional detours will become commonplace.

Non-linear career trajectories enable job seekers to move between roles, industries, companies and, yes, even careers. This freedom empowers people to do more of what they love and more of what they're good at.

The notion of what a “good” career path looks like is changing. Just as one-size-fits-all never truly fits anyone, today's professionals are making it clear that the linear corporate ladder may not be the most comfortable fit or the most effective way to the top. Sometimes, the corners are more fun than the straightaways.

**Which is what this guide is all about: finding the EX you crave, exploring the path that fits, and discovering the career drivers that matter most to you.**





# LET'S REFLECT

## Dream big. What's important to you?

What drives people to change jobs? A better EX. A job that aligns with your values. The definition of a "better" employee experience is different for everyone. Common EX attributes include:

- Diversity, inclusion, equity & belonging
- Advanced technology
- Remote & hybrid options
- Wellness programs
- Training & development opportunities
- Salary & benefits
- Agility
- Entrepreneurial environment
- Opportunities for growth
- Meaningful work
- Stability
- Flexibility
- Job satisfaction
- Candid & open culture
- Predictability



## Take a strengths inventory

The temptation to focus exclusively on what you don't want in your career can be overwhelming. And it's tremendously limiting. Instead of focusing on the negative, flip your thinking around and focus on what you want and what you're good at.

Reflecting on your strengths and interests will help you identify the things you enjoy and will lend clarity to your job search. For an even deeper strengths dive, you can discuss your options with a career consultant or invest in strengths or personality assessments like the [StrengthsFinder 2.0](#) or the [Enneagram](#).

### Self-Reflection Questions

- What are your greatest strengths?
- What brings you the most joy?
- Where have you seen the greatest results in your professional life?
- What achievements are you most proud of in your work life?
- Think of three instances where you received positive feedback from your peers, clients, or supervisors. What are they? What do they have in common?
- What types of projects can you complete quickly and with pleasure?
- What types of projects are more challenging for you?
- What company initiatives are important to you?

## Identify areas for growth

Playing to your strengths and doing more of what you love are important, but they are not the only lenses to look through as you're exploring your career drivers.

### Ideas for Exploration

- What skills are you interested in acquiring?
- What talent would you like to hone?
- What certifications have you been "meaning to get"?
- What are your strengths that could benefit from additional development?
- What initiatives or business transformations excite you most?
- What industries align with your values?
- What role (e.g., individual contributor, team lead, project leader) do you enjoy most?
- What benefits are most important to you and your family?
- Stay connected. Identify areas for professional networking.
- Find a mentor who can help you transition your career.
- Practice being your own advocate and ask for more responsibility.



## Reflect on your career with in public accounting

This isn't a place for negativity or career criticism. It's a place for reframing.

### Ideas for Reflection Generation

- My ideal days almost always start with \_\_\_\_\_.
- By the end of the average workday, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.
- My dream work environment is \_\_\_\_\_.
- I feel most competent and accomplished when \_\_\_\_\_.
- I struggle when \_\_\_\_\_.
- I get frustrated when \_\_\_\_\_.
- I'm exhausted and unproductive when \_\_\_\_\_.
- Overall, I'd say that the clients I've worked with have been \_\_\_\_\_.
- Overall, I'd say that the coworkers, managers, and teams I've worked with have been \_\_\_\_\_.
- During my career, I have/have not had the chance to explore a variety of opportunities and experiences.



# TAKE THE VACO CAREER DRIVERS QUIZ!

Now that you've considered your strengths, identified areas for potential growth, reflected on your career, it's time to take the Vaco Career Drivers test to narrow in on the EX that's right for you.

Vaco has identified nine key career drivers to help candidates prioritize their needs, assess current job satisfaction, and make smart, informed decisions about their careers.

**On a scale of 1 to 9** (with 9 being most important to you) prioritize the following nine key career drivers. Remember, you can't have nine number one drivers! The goal of the quiz is to help you prioritize your top drivers.

Rank	Key Career Drivers
	<b>Salary</b> Show me the money! Compensation based on experience, education and effort is very important to me.
	<b>Benefits</b> Show me the extras, please! Non-salary compensation including health insurance, PTO, education reimbursements, remote or hybrid work, retirement and wellness is what makes my heart beat faster.
	<b>Opportunities for growth</b> The taller the ladder, the better. What's the next rung and how do I get there? OR: I'm a life-long learner and I need to work for a company that fosters my need for growth and discovery.
	<b>Stability &amp; predictability</b> Surprises aren't my thing. I love my lane and I'm happy in it.
	<b>Flexibility, work-life balance, remote &amp;/or hybrid options</b> I give my all at work and I hope my employer values my time outside of work. (And I don't need to be office-bound to do my best work.)
	<b>Culture, people, relationships</b> I want to bring my whole self to work. Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is a big deal. I need to feel respected and valued for who I am and what I bring to the table.
	<b>Location</b> I love my car, but my commute? Not so much. The shorter, the better.
	<b>Industry</b> I am determined to work in the _____ industry.
	<b>Job satisfaction</b> What I accomplish each day and my contributions to the work are far more important than the industry I do it in.



# GO FOR IT

## Own your professional journey

Now that the drivers are ranked according to importance, what do they tell you? Only the factors that are most important in your career and what you'd like to experience in your position.

For instance, if salary, benefits, and growth are your top three drivers, then perhaps seeking a role at a national accounting firm could be the path you take. However, if culture and flexibility rank among the top drivers, be sure those are part of your current or future position that charts a course as a consultant with a leading consultancy firm.

There's no right or wrong answer, but the top drivers are indicative of your expectations for your career.  
**Look for opportunities that meet those drivers for a rewarding, meaningful career path.**





## WITH YOU **ALL THE WAY**

If your current role is meeting your top three or four drivers, you're in a great position, congratulations! If your top drivers don't reflect your reality, you're not getting what you want from your career; or if you are in the market for a new job, then we invite you to schedule an appointment with one of our Accounting and Finance recruiting experts.

Because Vaco is **with you all the way**, we'll help you dig even deeper and gain a better understanding of your priorities. Don't be surprised if your top drivers change after a thoughtful conversation with one of our recruiters! We'll also help you prepare for the interview process so you get the answers to your driver questions. It's time to find an opportunity that aligns with your competencies, drivers and aptitude.

To discover a rewarding career path that fits your values and vision, visit our [job seeker page](#) or [reach out to us](#). Supporting candidates at every step of the career journey is what we do.

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