

# **Coaching a young graduate for job search Case Study**

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## Introduction

Early Gen Z, those born between 1996 and 2010, are now entering the job market, making up about one-fourth of the world population (employa.com, 2024). They are stepping into a highly unstable economic landscape shaped by downturns, war, the pandemic, and various other factors. Many have invested considerable time and money in their education, only to graduate and find themselves unemployed. A study by *The burning glass institute* and *Strada education foundation* reveals that 52 percent of graduates in the U.S. are underemployed a year after finishing their degrees (Burning Glass and Strada Institute, 2024).

Choosing a career post-graduation is critical, yet recent graduates are facing hurdles like, lack of experience, unrealistic expectations, and insufficient qualifications. The job market demands prior experience and credentials that they might not have. Additionally, this generation struggles with mental health issues and seeks workplaces that promote well-being and align with their values. However, they often lack awareness of what they can offer to the market and what their true purpose is. According to a recruiter interviewed by *Jobteaser*, young talents tend to respond to any job offer without thoroughly assessing whether the position truly fits their skills and aspirations (Jobteaser,2024).

The more they gain insight into themselves and their goals, the better equipped they will be to identify and pursue opportunities that resonate with them. Without this self-awareness, they risk lacking focus in their job search and missing valuable opportunities.

This case study focuses on a young graduate seeking guidance during a year-long job search filled with frustration. His experience revealed a potential niche for me, as many young adults encounter difficulties in their job search. While some organizations offer support, primarily focusing on refining professional CVs or networking, very few consider the individual as a whole, including their personal experiences and soft skills. Unlike past generations, who focused primarily on hard skills, today's job seekers must present their whole selves during interviews. This approach allows individuals to express their authentic selves while enabling companies to assess candidates more holistically, incorporating personal experiences, values, passions, and soft skills.

In this case study, I will explore how to coach individuals in discovering their authentic selves and finding job opportunities that align with this understanding. I believe that cultivating awareness of one's true self and desires is essential for securing a fulfilling job.

I use elements and methodologies of Design thinking and Ikigai. The objective was to examine the effectiveness, advantages, and drawbacks of utilizing these tools and methodologies in guiding young adults in their job search.

## **Case Description**

A young graduate approached me as he was overwhelmed with frustration after spending over a year searching for a job without success. He was sending out approximately forty applications each month, resulting in an equal number of rejections, which severely impacted his confidence and outlook. With a background in economics, his focus was primarily on corporate roles in project management, marketing, and portfolio management, believing these positions were ideal for him. However, during our initial meetings, it became clear that his mindset and limiting beliefs were preventing him from exploring opportunities in other industries or job functions.

He felt that he lacked the necessary competencies and experience for the positions he was applying for as most were aimed at candidates with more experience than he possessed. A conversation with a senior manager added to his concerns. The manager posed three questions "Where do you want to go?" "What do you bring?" and "What can you do?". He struggled to answer these questions, which only heightened his anxiety.

His goal for the coaching was to discover strategies to better focus his efforts on his job search. He aimed to feel more capable, confident, and self-aware. Additionally, he wanted to identify any gaps in his knowledge and experience and learn how to address them. This would help him to feel more capable.

## Methodology

I utilized elements from the Design thinking methodology, the Ikigai concept, and various ICF coaching tools. My experience in innovation, working for over fifteen years with Design Thinking, helped to design the sessions and give a framework.

The sessions were divided in three main phases.

1. Identifying the authentic self
2. Discovering new job opportunities
3. Exploring and acting on new opportunities

A total of six face to face sessions were conducted. Each session started by understanding the goal for the session from the client. The client received in phase one and two some homework, which was discussed at the beginning. Most relevant information was captured visually, clustered, prioritized and discussed.

## Findings

### Identifying the authentic self

Initially the client believed that success as a manager depended solely on hard skills.

Influenced by family perceptions, he viewed soft skills as weak and undervalued, making it difficult for him to accept their importance. He initially saw these skills as liability rather than assets and felt compelled to hide them. However, throughout the process, he came to recognize their value and began to take pride in them as others acknowledged his strengths in a positive light.

In addition to his established skills and background, he identified new abilities such as bringing people together, emotional intelligence, and helping others expressing themselves. He also discovered that he has a passion for nature and heritage-based topics. Furthermore, he recognized that his personality is more reserved. He prefers to savor moments and values quality time over rushing through life. He received positive feedback from friends and family about his noble character.

At first, he believed he lacked experience, but through coaching, he realized he had significant leadership experiences, having served as president of the student association for several years. He also discovered that his personal experiences—such as managing an Airbnb, renovating a castle, and his extensive knowledge of classic cars—were valuable tools that could be leveraged in a professional context.

Ultimately, he started to put all this together and recognized his authentic self, which made him feel much more self-confident.

### Discovering New Opportunities

The insights gained during phase one revealed new job opportunities. Prior to coaching, he focused solely on positions within multinational companies, but he now recognized alternative paths:

1. The chance to engage with smaller, more artisanal companies that align with his appreciation for quality of life and allow him to utilize his knowledge of heritage and the restoration of traditional items such as cars and watches.
2. The possibility of working for multinational companies that value heritage, artistry and craftsmanship, such as Rolex, Montblanc, Baccarat etc.
3. The opportunity to apply his knowledge and passion for nature and dogs by connecting with companies that share similar interests.
4. The opportunity to pursue a career in Human Resources, that would leverage his emotional intelligence and passion for bringing people together.

### Exploring and acting on new opportunities

Once the opportunities were identified, it was crucial to prioritize which ones the client wanted to pursue first and to develop a strategy for exploration. The client had numerous assumptions and questions regarding these new opportunities. He wondered whether his profile would resonate in these contexts, how people would respond, and what types of jobs he could realistically pursue. Specifically, he questioned whether a role in Human Resources might be too administrative.

These questions and assumptions were gathered, and a plan was created to find answers. The client came to realize that he had significant agency in leading these discussions, which made him feel empowered. He already had contacts within his network and was able to reach out to them with specific questions, topics, and a profile to test. Through these conversations, he gained deeper insights into himself, receiving valuable feedback on his profile and the job opportunities available to him.

### Testimonial from the client

#### 1. How do you feel today?

I am aligned with my heart for the most. I feel much better within my own shoes compared to before and I like this version of me today.

#### 2. How did coaching help you in this situation and pain points?

The coaching has helped me see the value where I didn't see it. I often tried to hide, to cover, or not value my feelings and downplay my people caring side, empathy and the kindness I have for others. Whereas, I am a very sensitive and compassionate person, I held a strong belief that being my authentic self in a professional setting would not lead to success. The coaching we did opened my eyes to the fact that embracing myself will, on the contrary, lead to something beautiful. I realized that I need to embody the character I have always kept hidden. Throughout our sessions, we focused on structuring my job search more effectively. We went deeper in the understanding of what I like the most and how to find some domains linked to it.

#### 3. How are you using these learnings today?

I keep looking for a job position now, but the way I do it, is smoother and smarter compared to the previous time of the coaching. I diversified my research; I look into details on the field where I could be happy and go to talk to people then. I continue to put into perspective what is happening around and realizing that beautiful things are coming, even slowly. I actually do the installation of my future work life, and I consolidated the base. Kind of a preparation before a journey.

## Conclusions

There is a significant opportunity in coaching young adults as they seek employment, especially since many are facing challenges due to the current economic climate, industry demands, and personal circumstances. The job rejections they encounter can further undermine their self-confidence.

This case study illustrates how applying a design thinking framework and concentrating on three key phases can greatly enhance an individual's self-esteem and empowerment. In the first phase, an emphasis on authenticity helps clients boost their self-esteem and clearly define their purpose, skills, and experiences, which can lead to new job opportunities. During this phase, assumptions and limiting beliefs may arise, but they can be reframed using ICF methodologies. These new insights can create additional pathways for enhancing their profiles, such as on LinkedIn, resulting in improved job offers and increased interview chances.

The exploration phase gives young graduates a sense of agency, empowering them to take charge of their careers and make informed choices instead of feeling passive in their job search.

The design thinking framework effectively supports coaching by offering a flexible yet structured approach. It is crucial to understand that the three phases complement each other and can be carried out in a non-linear manner. This iterative process may take time and could lead to client fatigue if prolonged. Therefore, it is advisable to keep iterations straightforward and brief. Additionally, conducting phase one in face-to-face sessions is beneficial, as it fosters trust through body language, eye contact, and physical presence, allowing for better recognition of non-verbal cues like facial expressions and gestures.

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