

TRANSCRIPT

I've got a quick question: "You know that feeling when you've watched five webinars, taken pages of notes, highlighted the important bits...
...but still haven't actually applied any of it?" Maybe you find your notes as you're trawling through looking for something someone said, two months later and it hits you again... the guilt!

That's planning disguised as progress. And it's keeping you stuck.
You don't need more input — you need output. Even if it's scrappy.

Thank you for joining me at the Little Moves, Big Careers podcast. I'm Caroline Esterson—career strategist, unsticker of brilliant humans, and your co-pilot through the chaos of real-world careers.

And this podcast?

Well it's for you if you've ever done everything 'right'... and still felt stuck, overlooked, or like you were shouting into a Teams call on mute.

Welcome to episode 7. This episode is your permission slip to be a little bit messy — but on purpose."

Perfection is a con.

It's productivity in a tuxedo — looks soooo impressive with pages of colour coded lists, maybe a mind map of connections and post it note labelled self-help books, but if the colour coding is as fat as you go then it does nothing useful.

And it's one of the biggest reasons people stay stuck.

Because as long as you're planning, prepping, researching, tweaking...
you're not risking. You're not experimenting. You're not moving.

Messy action gets results.

Will it be polished? No.

Will it be impressive? Maybe.

Will it teach you more than waiting ever could?

Absolutely.

So now I've had my rant It's time for one of our favourite segments.

[THE GAME: "HOW IT STARTED / HOW IT'S GOING (UNFILTERED EDITION)"]

EPISODE 7

MESSY ACTION, MAGIC RESULTS

Who doesn't love a little game right? — Messy Moves & Cringe Clues — where we celebrate the moments that felt like disasters... but somehow still moved the dial. Because guess what? Perfection is out, progress is in."

"Are you ready for Clue #1: PAUSE.. here goes.....This 'career move' involved an airport, an unexpected nap, and questionable footwear."

"Ouch indeed, Billy. Properly ruthless of you, but since we're playing the confessional game, let's set the scene clearly. I was young. Not-yet-thirty young—an age where enthusiasm reliably outpaces common sense. Edinburgh had charmed me thoroughly, and after delivering what I thought was a rather slick presentation, our hosts decided it'd be delightful to whisk us off on a whiskey tasting tour. Now, for clarity, this wasn't your quick sip-and-nod affair—this was a dedicated journey through the liquid landscape of Scotland, starting gently in the lowlands and triumphantly ascending to the heady peaks of the highlands.

Somewhere around the fourth or fifth dram, it entirely slipped my mind that I had a car waiting faithfully for me at Stansted Airport. By the time I stumbled back southward, it was painfully clear driving wasn't an option. I responsibly (or desperately, depending on perspective) decided to bed down in my trusty automotive accommodation at Stansted airport car park. Glamorous, right?

Morning sunlight has a funny way of highlighting poor choices, and mine came courtesy of an odd sensation when I fumbled into my work attire. In my slightly hungover state, it slowly dawned on me—I had precisely half a pair of black shoes and half a pair of blue. Fashionably mismatched wasn't really a thing back then. But did I surrender to embarrassment and bail on my client?

Absolutely not. Instead, I walked—slightly lopsidedly and confidently colourful—into that client's office, conducted the research, and brazened it out. Did they notice? Almost certainly. Did they comment? Graciously, no. And did they hire me again? Actually, yes.

Turns out commitment and colourful footwear are oddly charming when paired with absolute confidence. And anyway, life's too short to worry about matching shoes—especially before thirty.

"mmmmmm what can I say: 'She's bold and possibly a little bit colourblind... that or possibly.... Just... disorganised"

"Look, at least I had a wash and cleaned my teeth in the motorway services! But that's the thing with messy action. You show up anyway. One wobbly shoe at a time."

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“Ok next one, This career moment involved a hot drink, a white shirt, and a sudden change in altitude.

“Oh, for goodness' sake, you are determined to embarrass me, aren't you? This is the time we were pitching for a big contract. We were the upstarts against a very polished, well established consultancy. My colleague walks in holding her coffee, bumps into the Sales Director and they both end up wearing the coffee on their once crisp white shirts.

I turn to help, trip over the leg of the flipchart, and end up sprawled at his feet like I'm auditioning for a Shakespearean tragedy. We looked like a human health & safety hazard. But we regrouped. Presented like pros. And got the gig. They said we were more natural and this made us more believable! Who'd have thought it! Sometimes the mess is the warm-up act for your magic.”

“Ok ready for Clue #3: This career moment involved 200 unintended recipients and one very sarcastic comment.”

“Ah, yes. The classic 'reply all' disaster. I don't feel bad about this as I reckon everyone has done this at some point in their career.. if not why not?

I meant to send a snarky little 'Is this meeting really necessary?' to my colleague.

Instead, I sent it to everyone — including the Director.

Mortifying? Sure. But it sparked an honest conversation about pointless meetings and... we actually cancelled some of the scheduled ones. Accidental reform. You're welcome.”

“The secret to real progress isn't getting it right. It's getting it going. And then keeping it going. We're not building masterpieces here — we're building momentum.

“So here's the science-y bit — and it's juicier than you think. Psychologist Dr. Tim Pychy, a proper expert on says this: We don't procrastinate to avoid work — we do it to avoid feeling bad. It's not laziness. It's mood management.

So procrastination is all about survival.

Our brains are juggling too much noise, chasing dopamine, avoiding shame, and quietly hoping someone else will make the first move. So if you've been stuck... it's not because something's wrong with you. It's your brain doing what it was wired to do—keep you safe and small.

But you don't outwit an ancient survival instinct with colour-coded plans.

You outwit it by moving. Even if it's messy. Even if it's small.

You're human and you live and work in a world that makes motion feel risky and standing still feel deceptively safe. But remember every confident speaker once stammered. Every manager once avoided conflict. Every business owner once panicked about pricing.

And guess what? None of them got there through colour coded to do lists, or perfect pie charts. They got there through action. Awkward, brave, occasionally messy action.”

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Think of your career like compound interest. You don't need a grand gesture. You need consistent deposits. £2 here, £10 there – or in your case, one email, one brave ask, one unpolished move. Repeat. Grow. Watch the magic happen. That's the promise, right in theory but in real life, it's messier. What if you're not sure which deposit to make next? Or worse – you've made a few and nothing's happening? No fireworks. No fast-tracks. Just awkward silence and your brain whispering, "Told you so."

Here's the thing: Sometimes the results are happening – just quietly. Behind closed doors. Sometimes you've planted seeds... and what you need next isn't another move – it's patience, or positioning, or a tweak in who's watching. And sometimes you are making moves... but they're not quite the right ones yet. This isn't failure – this is feedback. It's the nudge to stop, zoom out, and ask: "Where's the real leverage point?" "Who needs to see this?" What shift would make this land louder?" So let's deepen the practical application by heading directly into this week's What Would Caro Do

Today's letter comes from overwhelmed from Oswestry. "Dear Caro, I've got loads of ideas – a side hustle, a course I want to take, a new job I'm half-interested in... but I keep getting overwhelmed. I'm scared to start the wrong thing or mess it up. So I do... nothing. What would you do?

Ah, paralysis by potential. I hear you.. this is me to a T so my advice here is extremely heartfelt. Look – messy doesn't mean mindless. You don't need to do it all. You just need to do something. Start small. Start badly. Test the waters. You're not launching a space shuttle – you're poking at possibility. Give yourself permission to be in progress, not polished. Just start with one little step and there you have momentum. You will soon find your motivation starts to carve out time in your calendar naturally. Choices can be overwhelming at times but the key is to lean into one thing and build from there.

[Quickfire Career Moves]

And now we have more choices for you with our 3 quick fire career moves but three's a feast, so today all 3 moves are your reminder to move, framed slightly differently.

Just one tiny, scrappy, curious move to make this week.

Pick it, own it, do it. You're not trying to nail everything. You're trying to get moving.

Here we go:

First up is all about Action before clarity.

Stop waiting for the clouds to part.

Clarity's not a prerequisite – it's a reward for starting.

Draft the message. Join the call. Click the bloody button.

Done is smarter than perfect. As Billy would say JFDI... just one thing that maybe makes you feel a little wobbly – just do THE THING – really, what is the absolute worst that could happen?

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2. Build Your Career Reps.

See action as your training regime. Every “meh” move you make is a rep — and reps build resilience. Open the doc? That’s a curl. Ask the question? That’s a squat. Show up when it’s easier to hide? That’s a deadlift for your future self. You’re not chasing perfection. You’re building stamina for the stuff that matters.

3. Treat mistakes as data.

You didn’t fail — you just downloaded new intel. Mess = map. Cringe = course correction. Weird win = plot twist.

So there you have it. Progress isn’t about waiting for the stars to align or your inner Beyoncé to appear —it’s about choosing one small, scrappy action and doing it on purpose. Day after day. Clarity comes from motion. Momentum comes from showing up. And just before we wrap—let’s deal with one of the worst offenders still floating around LinkedIn like it’s profound.

It’s time for this week’s Career Quote Crime...And our culprit this week is ...

✗ “Never do anything halfway.”

Sounds noble, doesn’t it? Like something a headteacher would say with a disapproving stare. But let’s be honest—it’s wildly unhelpful for actual grown-up careers. Because sometimes? Halfway is exactly where you should start. It’s how you test the waters. How you learn what works. And how you build momentum without losing your sanity. Doing something halfway isn’t failure—it’s a first draft. It’s opening the doc, sending the message, sketching the messy plan. It’s movement, and that’s the magic.

Here’s the better reframe: “Start with a little. Build with intent. Finish when it matters.” So next time someone says “never do anything halfway”... Smile sweetly. And go do something halfway on purpose—because that’s where real progress begins.

[Words of Encouragement]

And finally remember this,
“You don’t need to have it all figured out.
You just need to start.
Every bold, brilliant career you admire was built on a foundation of awkward first drafts,
uncomfortable experiments, and scrappy little steps.
So take yours.
Let it be wobbly. Let it be weird.
And let it be yours.”

Until next time.