

Welcome to the 2023 My So-Called Career's Advent Calendar!

24 festive words of work focused wisdom from the MSCC community to help set you up for success in 2024.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER ONE



One of the must-have books in any careers library is this absolute gem [Burnt Out](#) by the legend that is [Selina Barker](#).

If you can't remember the last time, you felt calm and clear-headed with energy to spare, you are not alone, but NEVER FEAR! Selina will help you put yourself gently to the top of your to-do list with a toolkit for thriving in 2024. There is still time to pop this on your Christmas list... or to get a copy for a friend in need.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER TWO



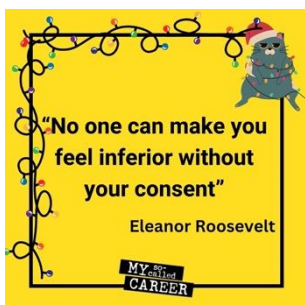
My 3 GOLDEN questions, suggested here by the very lovely Lucy Hughes! I firmly believe that the answers to these 3 questions hold the key to work peace. If you are feeling overwhelmed as the end of the year looms ahead, sit down with your to-do list and work through these.

Then do it again, because the first time round I bet you will say yes to them all. This time, get curious about it.

Does it need to be done? Says who? Is there another way to do it? What will happen if it doesn't happen til January? Or later? And am I ok with that? What am I worried about? Who or what could help me? What if I were to delegate it? How would I feel?

A few rounds of gentle interrogation might well get a lot off your plate. And free you up to face-plant into a mince pie in your pyjamas.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 3



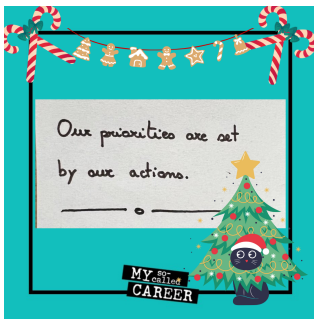
I love this quote. It reminds me of [Viv Groskop](#) talking about Michelle Obama embracing 'happy high status' in her book '[Lift As You Climb](#)'.

Status is always there in the background when there is more than one person - it is just sometimes more overt than others, we tend to think it is inherent - if we think about it at all - but it most certainly is not.

You get to determine the status you assign yourself, and that which you assign to others. If you are feeling inferior around someone, instead of accepting that position by default, think about breathing deeply, standing tall, making eye contact, and taking up the space you deserve.

Don't cede your status to someone who hasn't earned it. And note that those who have truly earned their status, are more likely to be generous with it.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 4



My own words are coming back to haunt me here, but this time beautifully handwritten by the wonderful Federica Cherubini.

Don't fall into the trap of being all mouth and no trousers in 2024. People notice when our words say one thing and our actions another. If there is something you want to do or change in your so-called career, don't stop at talking about it

Make a list of actions you can take and start taking them.

No matter how small you need to start, or how much scaffolding you need to hold you steady.

We make time for the things that are important to us - we don't wait to find it down the back of the sofa. If it is really a priority, it will show in your actions.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 5



Thanks to Dr Kat Martindale for sharing this one.

If you find your successes hard to hold on to, or your life is all to-do and no ta-da, this is a brilliant way to create your own personal highlights reel throughout 2024.

Each week write down a success, small or large, on a piece of paper and pop it in a jar (no jar? use a Tupperware or empty takeaway container - this is for you, not for Instagram!)

Then at the end of the year, sit yourself down with a mug of something warming, or a glass of something fizzy and fancy and read them all back to yourself. If you don't manage it every week, who cares? It doesn't need to be complete to count.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 6



Thank you to absolute star Vic Bolton for this one.

Why not you indeed?

I came across this as a quote before I realised it was actually the title of [Mindy Kaling's book](#), and it's something I want to say to so many of my clients who doubt their ability or question their right to a sustainable, successful or satisfying career.

To quote Kaling again... *"Confidence is just entitlement... Entitlement is simply the belief that you deserve something. Which is great. The hard part is, you'd better make sure you deserve it. ...Work hard, know your shit, show your shit, and then feel entitled"*.

Most of the women I come across ABSOLUTELY deserve it, so why not make 2024 the year you commit to showing your shit?

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 7



[Herminia Ibarra](#) is the career-change queen.

Her book [Working Identity](#) should be your first stop if you are chewing over a change for 2024 - because career change is so much more than simply switching up what you do to earn money - it touches on so many facets of our identity and is rarely a 'one and done' situation.

We have to feel our way, take time and allow ourselves to adjust and adapt as we go, which takes real courage - particularly if you are the type of person who likes to have things all mapped out before you commit.

She also shares her insights in Harvard Business Review, and on LinkedIn so you can whet your appetite before you dive in.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 8



One of the unhelpful traps we can fall into when it comes to our so-called careers is holding ourselves to an outdated definition of success.

Our version of success shifts and changes as we do. As we grow and experience more, it expands to accommodate us. As we become clearer on what is most important to us, or our priorities change, success might start to look very different, with former ambitions being parked or paused in favour of others which are more meaningful or immediately relevant.

We can also realise that what we thought was our own personal vision of success actually belonged to a parent, partner or boss and we had taken it on without questioning its source. If we don't update our success story, we can feel that we are failing when actually the opposite is true.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 9



I am a huge fan of [Margaret Heffernan](#), so was incredibly chuffed to come across these particular words of wisdom to share with you.

Realising that being good at something isn't reason enough on its own to make it 'our thing' can be so liberating. It opens the door to choice and possibility.

To doing things we enjoy, to learning new things, and to taking ownership of our so-called careers in new and exciting ways.

If you feel saddled with something you're good at, why not allow yourself to get curious about what else is out there?

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 10



A bit of a build on yesterday's quote here but taking control of what you want to be known for rather than leaving it to chance can open up so much possibility and give purpose and direction to your actions and decisions.

To get you going in the right direction in 2024, write 3 versions of your bio.

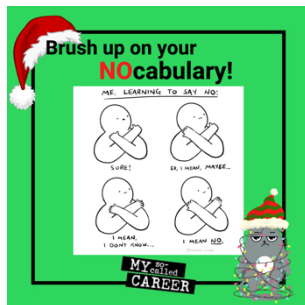
The first highlights what you want to be known for now - telling your story in a way that feels right for you.

The second shows where you want to be in 12 months time

The third for 2 years time.

Now consider what you need to do to build between the bios. What skills do you need to grow? What strengths or experiences do you need to show? Which people or platforms can help make that possible?

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 11



This one inspired by Alaina Vieru, and gave me the opportunity to share the amazing work of Worry Lines ([instagram.com/worrylines](https://www.instagram.com/worrylines)) which I LOVE!

For such a small word, we really find NO a hard one to master, so do yourself a favour in 2024 by brushing up on your NOcabulary.

When we can confidently say NO to things, we make space for the things we want to say YES to. If saying NO is hard for you, it might help to remember that by saying no to something, or someone, you are not rejecting them and everything they stand for out of hand, or saying 'absolutely no way, categorically never, thank you very much' (or not often at least!)

More likely it's a simple mismatch of situation, action and priorities. They are offering one thing when you need another, and you can clarify that in your response if it feels helpful.

That said, I find that polite and upfront, leaving no room for doubt is generally the best option. Going overboard on explanation can make it harder all round.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 12



A great one here from Sophie Bergeret.

It's easy to come up with a laundry list of things and people that stand in between you and your goals. Much harder to get a handle on is the many ways we have of subtly (or not so subtly!) getting in our own way or tripping ourselves up.

If you have a regular reflection practice - and if you don't, perhaps now is a good time to start! - then *'how did I get in my own way this week, what happens when I do that, and what can I do differently next week to step out of it?'* is a pretty good question to include.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 13



Courtesy of Katy Zack here, and one for all my perfectionist, completist crew!

Instead of trying to get all your ducks in a row BEFORE making a move - a route doomed to disappointment as ducks are famously rubbish at queuing - make 2024 the year you commit to doing your working out in the wild and leaving the ducks to their own devices 🦆🦆🦆

Come up with a hypothesis and test it by talking to people and trying things - work out what you think about something by finding out instead of thinking it out.

Swallow your doubts about people judging you for not knowing what you don't know and let yourself learn. People are more likely to come on board with your curiosity and get a kick out of supporting you. So, get out and knock on doors, instead of staying at home wrangling ducks.

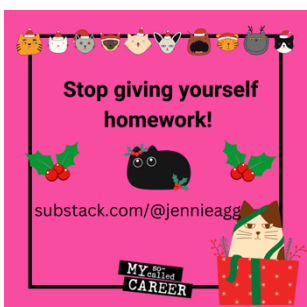
BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 14



One from my wonder wall here (aka the pinboard above my desk) Musterbation is my catch-all term for the 'musts' and 'shoulds' and 'need tos' we collect as we move through life, which, when left unchecked will have you shoulding all over yourself before you know it.

The worst thing about these erroneous expectations or crooked criteria is that they rarely originate with us. They are imposed on us by other people, by society, media, advertising and social media and even when well meant they rarely lead to us feeling anything other than rubbish. Tuning into the musterbation and trying to hear whose voice is speaking when you bust out a should, or simply noticing where they come up and asking yourself 'says who?' can help you disrupt the default. Leaving loads of room for you to get comfortable expressing what you actually want.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 15



[This newsletter post](#) suggested by the amazing Catherine Kernot is another one for the completists.... those of you who can't seem to help but create a never-ending stream of self-imposed homework wherever you go.

Recognise that it is a choice. And because it's a choice, you can choose not to do it. To leave courses unsigned up for, books unread, series incomplete, to have hobbies rather than side hustles and do things for fun rather than punishment.

And I say this as a woman who once watched all 15 seasons of ER - 331 episodes, all 8 seasons of House - 177 episodes, and all 5 seasons of The Wire - 60 episodes - I keep a log of all the books I read, have a reading list that would last me into retirement, and at least 3 masters courses I would sign up for in a heartbeat if I could afford them. So these words felt like they could have been written for me!

"Not everything has to be a project, schematic, rational, pointed in the direction of mastery and self-optimization. Pleasure, by its nature, is often random, unexpected, capricious. You make the most of it by rolling with its whims." If you could do with being a bit more capricious in 2024, why don't you join me in trying to give homework the heave-ho?

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 16

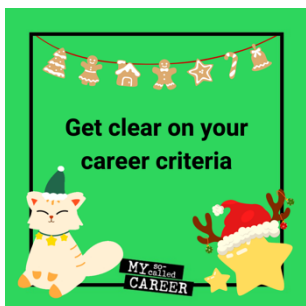


Hands up who would have Carrie Fisher's 'user's guide to life' on their Christmas List if it happened to be available?

You do not have to feel confident in order to speak up or take action, in fact, if you wait until you do, you are likely to be waiting for a VERY long time. By speaking out regardless and letting feeling follow action instead of waiting for action to follow feeling, you reduce the power your mind monkeys have over you and take the wind right out of their sails 🗨️🙊🐒

It won't necessarily feel comfortable but each time you summon up your strong voice to say or do something despite feeling like the smallest version of yourself, you make it that little bit easier for next time, until the strong voice starts to come naturally. [Lauren Currie](#) has some amazing tips for taking action to build confidence if this is an area you could use some support in.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 17



Big shout out to Anna Jay for this one, because it will save you A LOT of time and energy over the course of a lifetime.

Make the time to get really clear on your criteria BEFORE you start looking for jobs. That way, you are less likely to get your head turned by a bunch of shiny things that distract you from a lack of substance. What is really important to you? money? flexibility? progression? stability? people? purpose? leaders to learn from? autonomy? culture? What are your red flags?

Which are non-negotiable, and which are nice to have?

What would you be willing to trade?

By doing this BEFORE you start applying, you create a personalised set of filters.

If a role or company clearly doesn't measure up, then you can save your energy and move on to the next, knowing you aren't missing out.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 18



I was delighted when Abigail Edge suggested [this post](#) from the Marginalian for the advent calendar, because I have the Annie Dillard quote above my desk which I reflect on often, and am a longtime Marginalian subscriber, in permanent awe of Maria Popova.

In Abigail's words....*"What this says to me is that when big goals feel out of reach or you're struggling to find meaning, the little actions you do each day can all add up to something bigger. You're still a writer, even if you 'only' write for 30 minutes a day. Making time to be present each day means making time for your authentic self."*

In a world full of 'monk mode' and musterbation, I will take presence over productivity ANY DAY!

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 19



Lynnette Lawrance suggested this one, and in fact I should really dedicate the whole of this year's advent calendar to Lynnette because every year she tells me how much she appreciates it, which is a powerful reason to do something when you are wavering, which I was a few weeks back.

How many times have you found yourself banging your head against a metaphorical wall with a problem which stubbornly refuses to turn into a solution, or allowed sunk cost fallacy or one of its mind monkey buddies to keep you committed to a course of

action which is going nowhere?

Resist the temptation to zoom in further. Instead, zoom out - create some space between you and the situation - until you can see what else might be possible, and explore the impact of different paths. Because trust me (and Lynnette) there will always be another way.

Image by the absolutely brilliant Marissa Solomon Shandell aka [@ResearchDoodles](#).

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 20



This one was suggested by a few of you, including Sophie Bergeret and Katy Zack.

Scaffolding is a foundational part of my coaching work and one I know many of my clients return to time and time again.

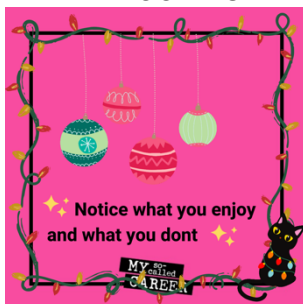
What is the unique combination of routine and ritual, people and practices that is strong enough to support you, with enough flexibility to absorb shocks?

We support buildings when they are under stress, so why do we expect ourselves to stay standing unaided no matter what we have

going on around us?

Once you know what and who you need for your baseline support structure, you can build your scaffolding up or down as the situation requires, exploring frequency, intensity and variety of activities. If your scaffolding is feeling a bit wobbly, why not give it a tune up over the Christmas break so it is strong enough to support you in 2024?

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 21



Thank you to Elyem Chej for this one. All things are not created equal.

Get into the habit of noticing what you really enjoy, what actively brings you pleasure, joy or satisfaction, what is actually just ok, a bit meh, and what you actively dislike - perhaps even feeling harmful.

It's funny how many things we keep doing despite ourselves.

Once you have a bit of data, you can make much more intentional decisions about how you use your energy - what you want more of, what you want less of and what you might be ready to leave behind

entirely or start to hold more lightly.

The things we do can easily become intertwined with who we are, leaving us feeling vulnerable or incomplete when they no longer serve us or we begin to outgrow them, and starting something new can be challenging - suddenly a beginner rather than an old hand - but with time, and plenty of scaffolding, we can make the adjustments needed to make more space for the stuff that serves us.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 22



The average adult brain makes about 35000 decisions per day. Some are a lot more conscious than others, and some with a lot greater consequence.

But what was your best one this year? What gives it that status? and what changed as a result of it?

Whatever it was. It is something to be proud of, so allow yourself space to celebrate.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 23



I feel like I can see this on the cover of some archival 'careers advice for wayward women' pamphlet.

I came across it in Kate Mosse's book [Warrior Queens & Quiet Revolutionaries: How Women \(Also\) Built the World](#) which is full of women who could inspire anyone's so-called career, so if you're unsure of your look for 2024, maybe this could be you?

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 24



FINALLY... we have reached the end.

I have run out of ridiculous festive cats and am ready to retreat into the warm embrace of my mince pie mountain.

Thank you all for following along, for sharing your words of wisdom with the world, and for supporting me this year. You are all awesome and it makes me so happy to be able to play a part in your so-called careers.

See you in 2024!