



Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



May 2022

# The Proximity Principle

The Proven Strategy That Will Lead You to the Career You Love

Published 2019

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Many of us feel unmotivated, uninspired, or simply unhappy in our professional lives. In fact, around 70% of employees report feeling unsatisfied with their job. Career expert Ken Coleman offers help, explaining that the key to finding and keeping your dream job is found in an approach he calls **The Proximity Principle**. His method revolves around making the most of the people, places, and practices which are part of your life. In his book, Coleman includes helpful checklists along with real-life stories to help guide you in taking hold of your dream job using his “proximity principle.”

## Key Quote

“You were created to fill a unique role. The world needs you to fill it” (p. 205). — Ken Coleman

## Key Points

### INTRODUCTION

“That first step toward a dream job is always the scariest” (p. 5). But once you are ready to be bold, you can begin.

**What Is the Proximity Principle?** Identifying “opportunities to do what you love is as simple as getting around the right people and being in the right places” (p. 8). Coleman explains that, “The right people + The right places = Opportunities” (p. 14).

### THE PEOPLE

**The Professors.** Seek out people – Coleman calls them “professors” – who know how to do what you want to do. Professors will have these traits: “1. They Are Knowledgeable 2. They Are Passionate 3. They Push You to Grow” (pp. 26-27).

**The Professionals.** Seek out professionals who have mastered the skills needed to do what you have needed to do. Professionals will have these traits: “1. They Are Experienced 2. They Study Other Professionals” (p. 34).

**The Mentors.** Seek out mentors – people who guide and encourage you in a caring way – and do it for others. Mentors should have these three traits: “1. They Are Accomplished 2. They Are Understanding 3. They Are Caring” (p. 50).

**The Peers.** Surround yourself with peers who are also motivated. Helpful peers will have these traits: “1. They Have Shared Values 2. They Have Drive 3. They Speak Truth” (p. 66).

**The Producers.** These are the people who are running things in your dream field. They can help you “get in closer proximity to your dream job: 1. They Share Knowledge 2. They Provide Connections 3. They Offer Opportunities 4. They Give Direction” (p. 76).

## THE PLACES

**The Place Where You Are.** How many epic businesses have been started in someone’s garage? Get started with your own “zip code” – that is, metaphorically speaking, where you are right now. Have some grit and then get started (p. 96)!

**A Place to Learn.** Research about your field can help you “understand what you need to learn” and “where you need to learn it” (p. 101).

**A Place to Practice.** Practicing your intended craft –(in an internship, an apprenticeship, a volunteer capacity, etc) helps you learn by doing and gives you the freedom to fail. Coleman quotes Jennifer Westfeldt, who said, “I think we all learn by doing rather than thinking about doing” (p. 111).

**A Place to Perform.** Small beginnings yield great rewards. Jobs, including entry-level jobs, are places which show you three things: “1. How to Handle Pressure 2. When to Pivot” and “3. Confirmation” that you are on the right track (p. 133).


**A Place to Grow.** There comes a time in your career where you need to seek a place to grow. The right environment will have “1. Alignment of Values 2. A Healthy Challenge 3. A Clear Path Forward” (p. 144).

## THE PRACTICES

**Creating a Web of Connectors.** To reach people who will help you with dream opportunities, you should, “1. Inform Your Inner Circle 2. Create a Connection To-Do List 3. Connect with the People on Your List” (p. 163).


Making Your Connections Count. With those around you, “1. Listen 2. Be Humble 3. Add Value” (p. 176).

**Seizing the Opportunity.** Craft a “custom” resume for each job, but remember “producers hire people for jobs – not paper” (p. 183). Bring the right attitude and appearance to an interview, and follow up “the right way and soon after” (p. 188).



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**Adopting a Proximity Mind-set.** No matter your line of work, live with the understanding that your mind-set about your work must be nurtured. “1. Know Your Role 2. Accept That Role 3. Maximize Your Role” (p. 193).

**Pressing on.** Even when you falter or encounter failures, “Press on!” (p. 205).

**Key Concepts:**

**PART I: THE PEOPLE**

**The People to Look For**

“People who can help you land your dream job are working hard at this very moment. But they’re working for themselves, not for you” (p.14).

To get one of these people to help you, you can’t seek them out solely because you believe they will lead to an opportunity. People will only help if they want to help you. Being an enthusiastic learner or helping them solve a problem they currently have is a great way to show people you are interested in helping them (pp. 15-16).

“Look for people you can both give help to and get help from” (p. 16).

**The Professors**

No matter who you are, you will need someone to learn from who has the skills and experience in the field you want to work in. These people can be thought of as “professors” (pp. 26-27).

The first quality of a great professor is that they are knowledgeable and possess qualifications or certifications necessary to be successful in your desired field. With their breadth of experience, what makes a professor great is their ability to make complex matters understandable (p. 27).

Another key quality in a professor is passion, best seen through their desire to spread their knowledge and inspire others to learn more (p. 27).

Great professors “push you to grow.” They force you to improve. No matter how great your professors are, though, it is up to you to become a dedicated, lifelong learner (p. 28).

**The Professionals**

Professionals are people who excel in their field. They possess two key qualities: experience and deep knowledge of other professionals (pp. 34-35).

“You have to learn from the best of the best in order to become one of the best” (p. 40).

When you approach interactions with professionals, have three goals. “1. Learn Their Tricks of the Trade 2. Develop Your Own Method 3. Understand that Wisdom Comes from Experience” (p. 40).



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## The Mentors

Mentors have faced their share of obstacles and know how difficult the journey to success can be. This “been there, done that” attitude can provide you with perspective (pp. 50-51).

“Mentors are people who can guide, encourage, and hold you accountable as you make the climb to your dream job” (p. 48).

A great mentor knows what’s important to you, keeps your best interest in mind, and tells you hard truths even when they are uncomfortable. They know what you need to hear to reach your development goals (p. 51).

Having a mentor in every stage of your career is crucial. Clearly communicate expectations with your mentor – for example, the cadence and length of your meetings. A successful mentor-mentee relationship will encourage you to create other relationships with young professionals and “pass the torch” as you gain more experience (pp. 52-58).

## The Peers

Peers are those walking next to you on your journey to success. They can be coworkers, siblings, classmates, or others. They are meant to encourage and push you to succeed, often because they are on similar journeys (p. 63).

Peers possess three qualities: “shared values,” “drive,” and honesty. They should help you feel challenged, inspired, and encouraged (pp. 66).

## The Producers

Producers are influential people who create jobs and opportunities for others. While professors are interested in helping you grow, producers are interested in their own success (pp. 75-76).

Producers are connected to other producers who may help you on your climb and present you with new opportunities. Producers also offer insight into where the market for your passion may be headed and can identify pitfalls or mistakes.

Helping producers reach their own goals is the best way to encourage their support (pp. 79-81).

## PART II: THE PLACES

### The Place Where You Are

Most people would be surprised by how many nearby opportunities can get them closer to their dream job. People are no longer confined by their locations, as many companies offer remote opportunities (pp. 90-93).

The most important thing is to seize any relevant opportunities to get closer to your dream career (pp. 93-96).

### A Place to Learn. A Place to Practice

Everyone needs a comfortable environment to learn the skills necessary for success. These places can be traditional (e.g., schools, workshops) or non-traditional (e.g., an aspiring producer working in a movie theater) (pp. 101- 105).



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Most people opt to “keep their day job” and not dive headfirst into their dream career. Slowly practicing skills and integrating yourself into the culture of your next position is much more effective than putting your livelihood on the line. Imagine your future career and the skills needed to get there, and prepare incrementally (pp. 106-109).

“In your place to practice, you’ll start to convert education into execution!” (p. 111).

When you practice, you gain “real experience,” valuable feedback from experienced professionals in the field, the “freedom to fail,” and “personal wins” which will help others, too (pp. 112-113, 121).

In a place for practice, you can make mistakes and hone your craft as the stakes are relatively low. As these failures teach you more, you will experience “wins” that show you are in the right place and encourage you to keep going. Be prepared to practice in a place that is not glamorous and might pay nothing or very little, but nevertheless makes you excited (pp. 118-125).

### **A Place to Perform**

Entry-level jobs typically get a bad reputation, but they are excellent places to learn how to perform. In these positions, you will learn how to handle pressure, and you’ll understand how to determine if you are in the right place – or if you should pivot (pp. 131-133).

Pressure will only increase as you climb, so you must learn to manage it. Pivoting also enables you to understand when a topic, career choice, or decision was not the right one and effectively change your strategy or pursue something else (pp. 133-135).

### **A Place to Grow**

It is important to recognize areas that will encourage and support you as you grow on your journey (p. 141).

Alignment of values is crucial to finding a place to grow. You want to work somewhere that supports similar initiatives or morals as you, which will encourage you to work harder in pursuit of a shared goal.

The workplace must also challenge you in a healthy way, pushing you to do things you never thought possible, while respecting your boundaries.

Finally, this “place to grow” should have a clear path forward, as pursuing your dream career could mean outgrowing your current role (pp. 145- 150).

## **PART III: THE PRACTICES**

### **Create a Web of Connections**

You know more people who can help you reach your dream job than you think. It can be helpful to make a list of friends and family and branch out from there, identifying who may be able to lead you to opportunities (pp. 160-163).

Be creative and consider people you may not think of often beyond your close circle, like former teachers or neighbors (pp.164-166).



*Be prepared to practice in a place that is not glamorous and might pay nothing or very little, but nevertheless makes you excited.*



*Pressure will only increase as you climb, so you must learn to manage it.*



## Make Your Connections Count

The best way to make these connections count is to listen, learn, be humble, and add value. This will show that you are serious and dedicated, without being overbearing or rude (pp. 176-178).

## Seizing the Opportunity

Do not blast your resume out to prospective employers and expect them to respond. It is important to leverage your connections so your resume reaches people who will give you a chance. While your resume is important, remember that “producers hire people for jobs – not paper” (p. 183).

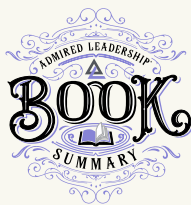
Preparation, appearance, and attitude are all vital. Most hiring managers will judge you quickly, so it is important that you come off as professional and ready to win. Follow up after an interview with a quick note of thanks (pp. 184-188).

## Adopt a Proximity Mindset

Adopting a proximity mindset is crucial but relatively simple if you follow the next three steps (p. 192).

- 1)** You must understand your job and what “winning” in that role looks like. Start with position expectations. Ask your supervisor questions about each responsibility in your job description. Research what makes other professionals in the same or similar roles stand out, and how they achieve great results (pp. 193-194).
- 2)** Next, you need to accept that role, whether it is your dream position or not. Do this by bringing an “attitude of gratitude” to every responsibility you have, no matter how mundane. Some positions may feel like a stepping stone but could become a cornerstone of your career and, later, a key to great success (pp. 196-198).
- 3)** Lastly, maximize your role by delivering exceptional work and being proactive, demonstrating that you are ready for more responsibility. Look to go beyond your basic job description by helping coworkers or offering to take on work that is not traditionally expected of someone in your position (pp. 199-201).

Coleman, K. (2019). *The Proximity Principle: The Proven Strategy That Will Lead You to the Career You Love*. Tennessee: Ramsey Press.



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*Maximize your role by delivering exceptional work and being proactive.*

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