

How to Stay Relevant in Your Career

A practical guide to navigating change with direction

Kieran Cornwall



Watch the full episode

This handout complements Kieran's *Build Your Edge* episode, "[The Career Advice That's Ruining Your Future](#)". Start by listening to the conversation, as it brings these ideas to life and provides the context to get the most value from this guide.

Build Your Edge 

Supported by **we**do.

Episode 25

The Career Advice That's Ruining Your Future

And the mindset that
takes you further than
you were trained to go.



Kieran Cornwall

How to Stay Relevant in Your Career

A practical guide to navigating change with direction.

Inspired by the [OECD Learning Compass 2030](#).

We Were Given a Map

Most of us did not consciously choose the way we think about our careers. We inherited it.

From school onwards, the message was steady and reassuring: choose carefully, specialise early, work hard, stay in your lane, and the path will reward you. There is a destination. There are milestones. There is a clear route from A to B, if only you are disciplined enough to follow it.

For decades, that thinking made sense. The world moved slowly. Industries evolved in predictable cycles. Careers unfolded in largely linear arcs. Depth in one domain could sustain an entire professional lifetime. The map was useful because the terrain was stable.

But the terrain is no longer stable.

Roles fragment and recombine. Entire sectors appear where none existed before. Technology reshapes the boundaries of work faster than institutions can adapt. The tools that defined expertise five years ago may already be outdated. And when the ground keeps shifting, a rigid map becomes increasingly unreliable.

The issue is not that ambition has weakened, nor that people are unwilling to work hard. The issue is that we are still using a navigation system built for stability in a world defined by movement.

[The OECD Learning Compass 2030](#) recognises precisely this challenge. Rather than focusing only on subject knowledge, it places the individual at the centre and highlights the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that allow a person to navigate complexity and change. It is not a roadmap. It is a compass.

A compass does not tell you the terrain in advance. It does not promise certainty. It gives you direction.

And in an unpredictable world, direction is more valuable than certainty.

Finding Your North: Knowledge

Every compass begins with north. It is the fixed reference point that allows every other movement to make sense.

In career terms, your north is your knowledge, but not surface knowledge. Not trends. Not the latest tool. Not what everyone is currently talking about.

Your north is what you truly understand.

The OECD framework distinguishes between disciplinary knowledge and broader interdisciplinary insight. In a professional context, that means understanding the first principles of your field, the structural realities that persist even when the tools and terminology change.

If you work in technology, the language you code in may evolve, but systems still rely on logic, structure and communication. If you work in sales, scripts may change, but trust, timing and psychology remain constant. If you lead teams, management trends may fluctuate, but clarity, accountability and alignment endure.

When you build your career on first principles, you anchor yourself in something that travels. You become less dependent on any one platform or process. Change becomes adaptation rather than threat.

North does not prevent storms. It helps you orient yourself within them.

Looking East: Attitude

If north gives you orientation, east shapes how you begin your day. It is where the light rises.

Your attitude toward uncertainty determines whether you move toward opportunity or retreat into comfort.

The OECD Learning Compass emphasises curiosity, resilience and agency as essential traits in a changing world. These are not abstract virtues; they are practical differentiators. Two individuals with identical skills can diverge dramatically based on how they interpret discomfort.

When placed in an unfamiliar environment, one may protect identity; “this is not my lane.” The other may lean into the discomfort; “what can I learn here?”

A compass mindset replaces rigid identity with directional identity. Instead of defining yourself by your current role, you define yourself by the direction you are moving in. Instead of asking whether something fits your existing label, you ask whether it aligns with your long-term orientation.

East is not about optimism for its own sake. It is about openness to growth.

Without the right attitude, even strong knowledge remains static. With the right attitude, limited knowledge expands rapidly.

Understanding the South: Skills

South grounds you. It connects direction to action.

In the OECD framework, skills span cognitive, social and practical capabilities. In career terms, they represent what you can actually do, not just what you know.

Modern workplaces often separate “hard” and “soft” skills, yet in practice they are deeply interwoven. Analytical ability strengthens communication. Organisation enhances execution. Emotional intelligence improves influence. Learning agility compounds everything.

The myth of the narrow career suggests that skills must remain confined to a single domain to be valuable. The reality is that skills compound across contexts.

The discipline developed through sport, the pattern recognition honed through music, the coordination learned in community leadership, these experiences may not appear on a traditional career map, yet they strengthen your overall capability. They increase your resilience in unfamiliar terrain.

What sometimes looks like a scattered background is, in fact, integrated range.

South reminds you that movement requires capability. The broader and more connected your skillset, the more confidently you can adjust direction without losing momentum.

Anchoring West: Values

If north orients you, east energises you and south enables you, west stabilises you.

Values are often the quietest dimension of the compass, yet they may be the most powerful. Without them, ambition drifts. You can climb efficiently in the wrong direction.

The OECD Learning Compass places strong emphasis on responsibility, wellbeing and long-term contribution. In career terms, values answer questions that the traditional map ignores:

- What kind of problems do I care about solving?
- What trade-offs am I unwilling to make?
- What kind of person am I becoming through this work?

Values do not restrict movement; they refine it. They prevent reactive decision-making. They ensure that experimentation remains aligned with something deeper than immediate opportunity.

When your values are clear, direction becomes intentional.

Moving with the Compass

When you bring north, east, south and west together, knowledge, attitude, skills and values, something changes. You are no longer dependent on a fixed plan. You are capable of navigation.

The map promises certainty. It suggests that if you follow its instructions precisely, the outcome is predictable. But maps are drawn for specific terrain at specific moments in time. When the terrain shifts, the map becomes outdated.

A compass does not eliminate uncertainty. It accepts it. It recognises that obstacles will appear and that routes will change. It does not guarantee the shortest path. It provides orientation.

If the structure you were trained within disappeared tomorrow, would you still know which way to move? Would your understanding, your skills, your mindset and your values give you enough direction to continue progressing without a predefined route?

That is the real test.

Your job title will change. Your tools will change. Your industry may change. But your integrated compass, continually refined and recalibrated, remains with you.

The advice you were given was not wrong. It was incomplete.

In a world that will not stand still, direction matters more than certainty.

And when you know how to find your north, adjust your east, ground your south and anchor your west, you no longer need to follow someone else's map.

You can move with intention, wherever the terrain takes you.

About Kieran

Kieran Cornwall is a Principal Consultant whose career has intentionally challenged traditional paths. He has worked across banking, media, software engineering, and consulting, building strong technical foundations while broadening his expertise. From quality assurance and engineering to alliances and advisory roles, Kieran has consistently stepped outside his comfort zone to learn new systems, environments, and approaches.

What sets Kieran apart is not a single specialism, but his ability to connect disciplines, understand first principles, and apply those insights across industries.

He believes careers built solely on narrow expertise are increasingly fragile and that long-term resilience comes from developing direction rather than rigid plans.

Throughout his career, Kieran has combined technical depth with curiosity, experimentation, and a willingness to restart when growth demands it. Whether teaching software engineering, working with high-performing teams, or advising organisations, he focuses on helping individuals recognise their broader capabilities beyond job titles.

His core belief is that while roles may change, an individual's integrated knowledge, skills, and mindset remain constant.

Connect with [Kieran on LinkedIn](#) to follow his thinking and insights.

Kieran's Build Your Edge episode

- Episode 25: [The Career Advice That's Ruining Your Future](#)