



The Alignment Trap

THE PATTERN

"I'm excellent at something I don't believe in."

What's Underneath

You followed a path that made sense: good money, clear advancement, skills that matched. Somewhere along the way, the work stopped meaning anything to you, but your competence kept growing. Now you're exceptional at something that feels hollow.

The gap between your capabilities and your conviction creates a specific kind of exhaustion. You're not burned out from too much work. You're burned out from work that doesn't connect to anything you actually care about.

Where Else It Shows Up

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT WORK

You've gotten skilled at describing what you do without revealing how little it means to you. The enthusiasm you project isn't fake. It's just not connected to the work itself.

SUNDAY EVENINGS

The dread isn't about workload. It's about spending another week being excellent at something that doesn't feel like yours.

MENTORING OTHERS

You find yourself subtly warning people away from your path while officially advocating for it. "It's great, but..." becomes your signature caveat.

LIFE OUTSIDE WORK

Your real energy goes into hobbies, side projects, or family. Anywhere that actually reflects your values. Work funds the life; it doesn't contribute to it.

What Helps

Get specific about the misalignment. Is it the industry? The function? The company's values? The impact? "I don't like my job" is too vague to act on.

Look for alignment opportunities within your current role before assuming you need to leave. Sometimes the gap can close by shifting focus, taking on different projects, or moving laterally.

If the misalignment is fundamental, start building toward something that does connect, even if the transition takes years. Small moves toward alignment accumulate.

Three Questions

No right answers. Just honest reflection for you to keep.

ONE

Name the last thing at work you were curious about. Not something you needed to solve. Curious about.

If you had to reach back a long way for that, the reaching is the answer. If one came quickly, hold on to what it was about.

TWO

Think back over last weekend. What did you do that you'd have chosen even if nobody had asked?

Nobody asked you to do that. Nothing about it was required, and you did it anyway. Almost everything else in your week has someone else's fingerprints on it, which is why this one is worth holding on to.

THREE

Name the person with the most at stake if you changed direction.

Some of what they'd stand to lose is real and countable. Whatever conversation you've had with them so far has been about the version of this you'd already decided to present.

The answer probably isn't quitting your job. That's the version everyone jumps to, and it's the reason most people never start. Caring about the work again rarely arrives as one big door. It shows up as a different project inside the same job, or an hour on a Saturday that turns into something you didn't plan. Both of those are available to you this month, and neither requires an announcement.

