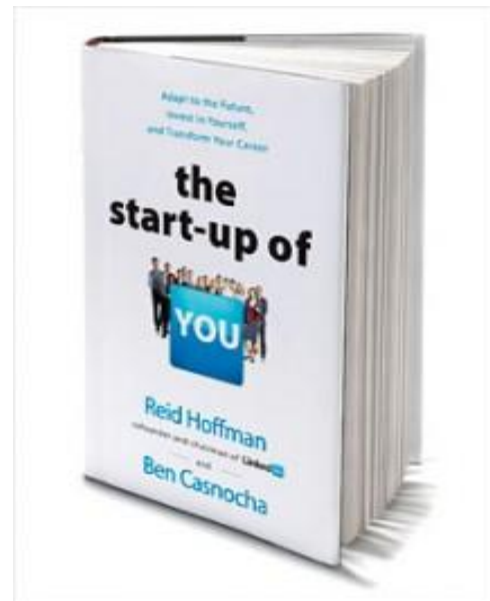


## How to create an ABZ career plan mind map

Career planning can benefit greatly from mind mapping, because it enables you to view multiple perspectives and possibilities in a compact, visual format. In this report, we're going to take a closer look at how to adapt Reid Hoffman's brilliant ABZ planning technique, which takes a simple but very creative approach to helping you make the most of the opportunities you will face throughout your career. Hoffman was the cofounder of LinkedIn and created this savvy approach as part of his excellent new book, [\*The Start-up of You: Adapt to the Future, Invest in Yourself, and Transform Your Career.\*](#)



Note: This report is adapted from a blog post that recently appeared on my [Up Your Impact book blog](#). I have expanded upon it to show you how a mind map can be used to implement this career planning technique.

### What is ABZ career planning?

Because change is coming at us so fast today, we need a life planning technique that enables us to maximize our impact in our current position (Plan A), while also clearly see what our next step and pivot to it at the proper time (Plan B) – yet still have a reasonable fallback position if leaving to the next level turns out to be a mistake or failure (Plan Z) – a survivable worst case scenario.

In his book, Hoffman calls ABZ planning the perfect antidote to the traditional *What Color is Your Parachute* style of career planning, which emphasizes doing an inventory of your strengths and then setting goals focused on the types of jobs you would like to acquire.

Hoffman explains the thinking behind his planning framework:

*“It is an adaptive approach to planning that promotes trial and error. It allows you to aggressively pursue outside and mitigate against possible downside risks. ABZ planning isn’t something you do once early in your career. It’s a process that’s as important for someone in their 40s or 50s as for newly minted college grad. There is no beginning and middle or end to a career journey; no matter how old you are or at what stage, you will always be planning and adapting.”*

## **Plan A: Your current position**

Plan A is what you’re doing right now. It’s your current implementation of your competitive advantage. Within plan A, you make minor adjustments as you learn; you iterate regularly.

## **Plan B: Your pivot point**

Plan B is what you pivot to when you need to change either your goal or the route for getting there. Plan B tends to be in the same general ballpark as Plan A. Sometimes you pivot because Plan A isn’t working; sometimes you pivot because you’ve discovered a new opportunity that’s just better than what you’re doing now.

*“Pivoting isn’t throwing a dart on the map and then going there. It’s changing direction or changing your path to get somewhere based on what you’ve learned along the way,”* Hoffman explains. Once you pivot to a Plan B and stick with it, it becomes your new plan A.

What drives the need to pivot? Hoffman says it’s often caused by an inflection point at your company or in your industry. Such a fundamental change will force you to either change your skills or your environment. How can you tell when such an inflection point will occur? Hoffman acknowledges that it’s unpredictable. That’s why he recommends that you make some moves now to mitigate its impact on you when it does occur:

*“Instead of trying to do the impossible and predict when an inflection point will threaten, prepare for the unknown. Build up your soft assets and proactively embrace new technology so that if and when the inflection point does come, you are ready to swiftly parlay skills into a Plan B.”*

He says the best Plan B is usually different but very much related to what you’re already doing. Pivoting into an adjacent niche enables you to leverage the skills you are to have while continuing to grow them in a new direction. Often, this can be accomplished during evenings and weekends. You can start learning a skill in your spare time and start building relationships with people who work in the big adjacent industry or niche.

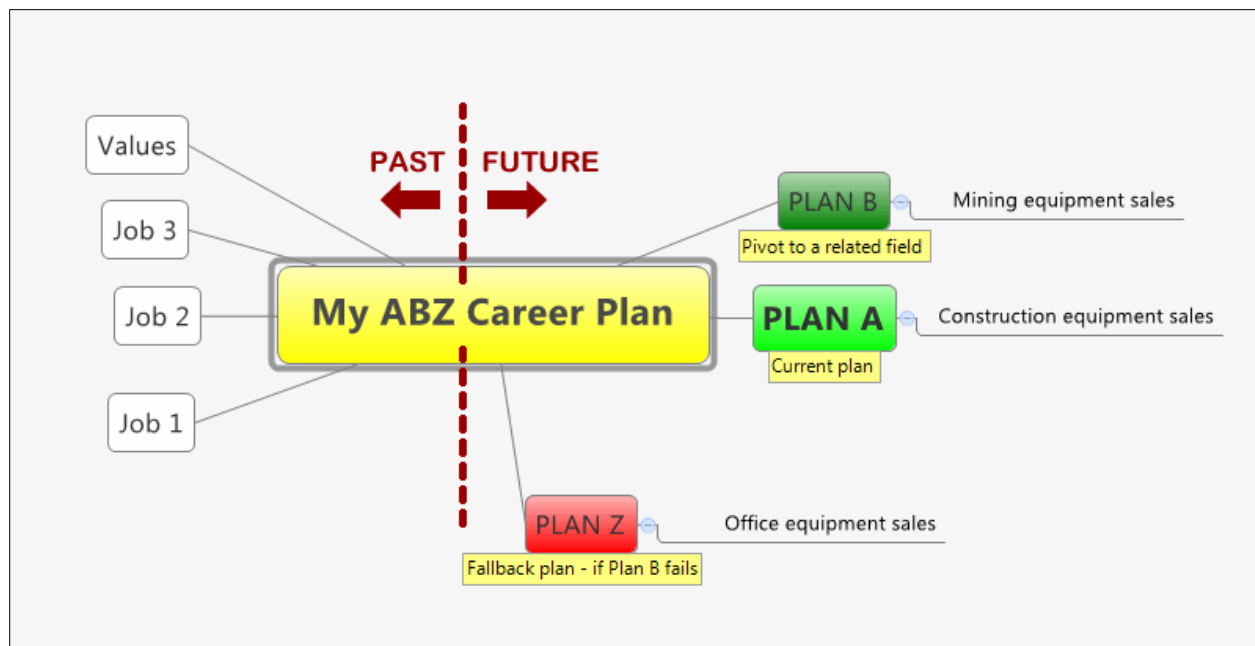
## Plan Z: Your safety net

Plan Z is your fallback position, your lifeboat, and it enables you to tolerate failure and bounce back. *“What’s your certain, reliable, stable plan if all your career plans go to hell or you want to do a major life change? That’s plan Z. The certainty of plan Z is what allows you to take on uncertainty and risk in your Plans A and B,”* Hoffman explains. *“With a Plan Z, you’ll at least know you can tolerate failure. Without it, you could be frozen in fear contemplating the worst-case scenarios.”*

You may have to live an austere life for a while as you recover, but at least you know you won’t be homeless, bankrupt or permanently unemployable.

*“Plan Z should allow you to retreat, regroup and develop an entirely new plan A. It’s not an end point – it’s what will keep you afloat while you reload and then relaunch yourself on a brand-new voyage, a brand-new Plan A.”*

## So what does this look like as a mind map?



Mind map created using XMind 3

**Note how this mind map has two distinct sections:**

**Everything to the left of the central topic** represents your past career. I’ve listed your current and two past jobs, plus a topic where you can describe your life’s mission or primary values. This gives you an idea of what your “true north” is and should have a significant influence on the

future direction of your career – the types of jobs you select and the attitude you bring to your work.

**Everything to the right of the central topic** represents your future – and describes your Plans A, B and Z. I have positioned Plan A on a horizontal plane with the central topic. This is your current job, your current plan. As we described Plan B earlier in this report, it is related to Plan A, and utilizes many of the same skills. So it is depicted at roughly a 30 degree angle upward and to the right of the central topic. Its proximity to Plan A tells us it's closely related to it.

For the sake of this example, I'm assuming that the job this person currently holds is construction equipment sales. Plan B, his "pivot," could be to mining equipment sales. The mining industry uses many of the same machine types as construction, so a significant amount of what our hypothetical person has learned in his current job could be transferrable to a position in mining equipment sales.

Finally, Plan Z is positioned at a 90 degree angle to Plan A, to indicate that it is a fallback position, one that our person could jump to if Plan B doesn't work out. In this example, I've assumed that he could get a job in general sales, say, for example, office equipment (large copiers, etc.).

For the sake of simplicity, I have only added one Plan B to this mind map. In reality, you would want to include multiple possibilities here. The whole idea of putting your ABZ career plan into a mind map is to enable you to clearly see all of the opportunities and possibilities you face – **in relationship with each other**. You could add as much detail to any of these branches as you see fit – pros and cons (with numerical weighting on each), advantages/disadvantages or even the names of potential employers you'd like to learn more about.

To create this mind map, it's essential that you use a program that gives you a great deal of freedom in positioning map branches. I selected XMind because it enables you to do so by holding down the ALT key in Windows while dragging a branch to its new position.

Note how I have used topic labels in XMind to remind me visually what Plans A, B and Z represent. In your map, you could indicate in Plan A what the name of your current employer is. Labels for Plans B and Z can be used in numerous ways to add context to what those career paths may mean in your life.

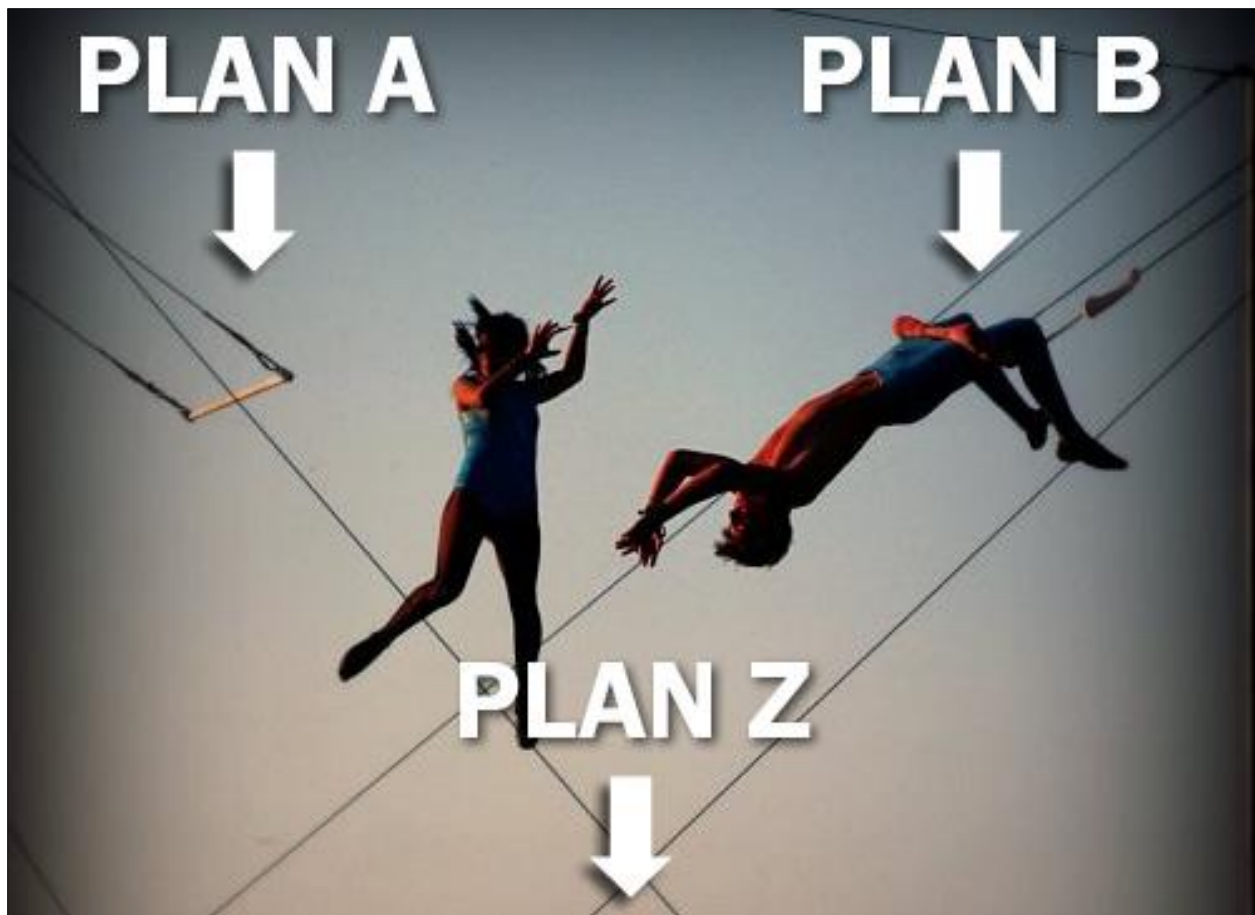
## ABZ career plan map template

[Download the XMind map template here](#)

### Conclusion

Why do I like the ABZ career planning model so much? Because in my opinion it brings greater clarity to the process of figuring out what you want to do with your career than any technique I've seen in a long time.

In today's fast-paced business world, experts tell us we may have as many as 10 different jobs in our lifetime. Chances are, they won't follow a neat, linear path from the past, through the present and into the future. Rather, most careers consist of jumping from one industry or profession to a related one. Knowing what these possible paths are is the hard part. What's worse, how can you make a risky leap forward unless you have a safety net under you, a Plan Z that you can retreat to, regroup and then resume forward progress once again?



It's something like the "work" of a trapeze artist (see the image on the previous page). She swings into the abyss, knowing that when she lets go of her swing, her partner must catch her arms, or she will fall. But she's not scared, because she has a safety net below her. Instead of pondering worst case scenarios (injury or death), she can concentrate on making the most of her daring performance.

Extending this visual metaphor to your career, having a Plan Z "under" you gives you the confidence to make great "leaps" forward to exciting new opportunities and possibilities that you may have previously avoided, because they seemed too scary or risky. Visualizing them in a mind map, like the one we've considered in this report, brings these opportunities into even clearer view, helping you to make better informed decisions and to manage risk appropriately.

## Questions?

Please contact Chuck Frey at [chuck@innovationtools.com](mailto:chuck@innovationtools.com).

Please [visit the Mind Mapping Software Blog](#) for all of the latest news, trends and resources related to visual mapping.

You can also [follow Chuck Frey on Twitter](#) for even more insights and ideas.