

Career Booster Workbook

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1. Introduction

by Mind Tools CEO James Manktelow

Everyone's career needs a boost now and then. Perhaps you feel that you've got into a rut. Maybe you're stressed, and just can't seem to climb out from under the weight of it. You might even be in the wrong job, and that may be causing you deep frustration.

We all get tired in our jobs from time to time. That's when we need a burst of motivation to get going, ratchet up our productivity, and get excited about work again.

Whatever your reasons for needing a career boost, this workbook will show you how to re-energize and re-motivate yourself, to reach a high level of job and career satisfaction.

To make it easier for you to find the material that you're looking for, we've split the workbook into three sections:

- Finding Your Passion – Are you doing what you love?
- Planning Your Future – Moving forward with a purpose.
- Career Boosting Skills – Increasing your personal productivity.

In particular, I encourage you to complete the self-audit in the "Finding Your Passion" section. This will help you to uncover core issues related to motivation, and help you to focus on your own, unique, career-boosting plan.

I hope you enjoy this workbook and find it useful!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Manktelow". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James Manktelow, CEO,
MindTools.com

2. Finding Your Passion

Are You Doing What You Love?

Are you doing what you love? Or do you feel that you're "going through the motions" in a job that you find unsatisfying?

One of the most important factors in boosting your career is making sure that you are doing work that you enjoy, and that you find satisfying and worthwhile. It's worth thinking about this carefully, because it gets a lot harder to motivate yourself if you're doing work that you are not passionate about.

This section is a self-audit that allows you to take stock of what you've already achieved in your life, your values, what you're good at, and what you do and don't enjoy. By comparing these qualities with the work that you're currently doing, you can decide what you'll do to make it more fulfilling.

Alternatively, if you are already actively considering a career change, this self-audit will help to you start to think about the direction that you want to head in.

What Are You Really Proud Of?

A great place to start with this is to list past experiences and accomplishments that you are particularly proud of. Examples might be earning a Most Valuable Player award for a sports team, creating a new product or process at work, helping a friend to solve a personal problem, or saving enough money to take a year off work and go traveling.

- What things have you done that make you especially proud?
- When you think about events from your past, what makes you energized and excited?

Action:



Think about things in your education, at work, or in your family life or leisure time that you are particularly proud of, and list them on the next page.

| | Your Pride Experiences |
|-----|------------------------|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |
| 6. | |
| 7. | |
| 8. | |
| 9. | |
| 10. | |
| 11. | |
| 12. | |
| 13. | |
| 14. | |
| 15. | |
| 16. | |
| 17. | |
| 18. | |
| 19. | |
| 20. | |

When you know what you've done in the past that has made you proud, it's easier to see the types of things that get you excited. Often, you'll find that these are things that you really wanted to accomplish, or worked hard to achieve.

By identifying your pride experiences, you can better understand the values that are at the core of your motivation.

What Do You Value?

The reason that you stick with a difficult task, take on a long-term project, or switch careers midway through life has a lot to do with what you value.

If you value career satisfaction, then you'll probably be prepared to work hard and take risks to find the career of your dreams. If you value helping others, you might be happy spending years in a lab working on a new drug.

If you can identify what it is that you value, you can start to uncover the elements that you need in a job to find satisfaction and happiness.

Action:



To do this, think about the pride experiences that you've just listed. Consider how you worked during the experience or leading up to the accomplishment. Then look at the statements on the next page and check the ones that apply to your pride experiences.

I value experiences where I am able to:

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | Move around at work | | Participate in personal development activities |
| | Work with my hands | | Work with others for a common purpose |
| | Work outdoors | | Get ahead in my career |
| | Structure my own work | | Influence others |
| | Demonstrate expertise in an area | | Afford a very comfortable lifestyle |
| | Contribute new ideas to my profession | | Impress people |
| | Answer complex questions | | Command respect and status |
| | Write and present my ideas | | Do what is expected of me |
| | Express my opinions freely | | Attend to details to meet requirements |
| | Create and develop new things or ideas | | Work in a secure environment |
| | Help others through my work | | Complete tasks that are clear and direct |
| | Contribute to a better world | | Predict my hours and work |
| | Make a difference | | Mentor other people |

If there are other things about work that you value, list them below.

Now, look over the lists you've created, and choose the five things that you value the most.

| Top Five Elements That You Value | |
|---|--|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |

In this list, you've identified the five things that you most value in your work. Now it's time to think about what you're good at!

What Are You Good At?

Whether you have had to work hard to master a skill or it comes naturally, you'll likely prefer doing work that you do well. The trouble is, we often don't take the time to think about all of the things we're good at. Perhaps it can seem boastful, perhaps we take these things for granted, or perhaps we just assume that everyone can do them equally as well.

Action:



Identify your individual skills by checking the questions to which you answer "yes."

| What Are You Good At? | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| | Do you have physical co-ordination and athleticism? | | Do you provide comfort? |
| | Are you good at building things? | | Do you mediate and liaise well? |
| | Do you work well with your hands? | | Do you teach, train and instruct effectively? |
| | Do you operate machines well? | | Do you plan, administer and set goals well? |
| | Are you good at working with nature? | | Do you advise and consult effectively? |
| | Are you logical and a good problem solver? | | Are you good at managing people, delegating and directing? |
| | Do you conceive or develop new ideas well? | | Are you good at selling, convincing others, and promoting ideas? |
| | Do you observe, investigate and synthesize events effectively? | | Are you good at budgeting and accounting for financial data? |
| | Do you entertain, sing or dance well? | | Do you attend to details? |
| | Are you artistic? | | Do you calculate and compute numbers accurately? |
| | Do you write and communicate well? | | Do you estimate and forecast effectively? |
| | Are you creative and imaginative? | | Do you monitor and coordinate schedules well? |
| | Do you care for, treat and heal others effectively? | | Are you good at organizing, cataloging and arranging? |
| | Do you counsel, coach and listen to others well? | | |

If you have other skills, or specialist ones, list these below.

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

Action:



Now choose the five skills that you consider to be your most important and significant ones.

Master Skills

| | |
|----|--|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |

Action:



Now review the things that have made you most proud, the things that you value the most, and your master skills. Bring these together into a list of the top five things that are important to you for career satisfaction.

| Most Important for Career Satisfaction | |
|--|--|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |

Looking over your "Top Five" lists, you now have a good picture of your strengths and the things that you need to be doing to feel a sense of vocation.

Take some time to evaluate the degree of fit between what you want and what your current job and industry offers.

If you conclude that the fit is reasonably good, has completing this exercise in self-discovery given you a bit of a boost? For many people, the process of sitting down and looking at their strengths and values is a great affirmation that what they are doing is right for them.

Action:



Look at the five things that you wrote in the table, above. Now think about how they fit with your existing job or industry, and write your findings in the table on the next page.

| How Do the Things That Are Most Important for My Career Satisfaction Fit My Existing Job/Industry | |
|---|--|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |

Sometimes we need solid evidence that our current path is the right one. Armed with that knowledge, it is much easier to be invigorated and get recharged. What's more, it allows you to focus yourself completely on your current career, rather than wasting energy wondering if "the grass is greener on the other side."

Where there is a large difference, you should reconsider your career path. You may be able to motivate yourself in the short term to stick with a job that isn't inherently satisfying, but the effort that you put into self motivation might be better spent planning and following a career that will meet your needs.

Equally, the better the match between your career path and your personal and professional needs, the more career satisfaction you will enjoy. Your job is to continuously monitor what is happening and to keep your career on target.

But What's Getting In Your Way?

The other side of finding your passion is to understand what **stops** you from enjoying your job. So it's worth looking at the things that you find unpleasant or overwhelming in your current role, and understanding what makes them so unpleasant.

Action:

Reflect on the things that you haven't liked about your job in the last month, and list the most significant of these in the table on the next page. Then choose the comment that describes your feelings most closely.



| What did you find unpleasant? | Why was it unpleasant? |
|-------------------------------|---|
| | <p>I don't currently have the skills needed to do this well.</p> <p>It wasn't. I could solve this by taking a more positive perspective on it.</p> <p>This is a necessary, bad part of an otherwise good job.</p> <p>I shouldn't have to/don't want to experience this.</p> |
| | <p>I don't currently have the skills needed to do this well.</p> <p>It wasn't. I could solve this by taking a more positive perspective on it.</p> <p>This is a necessary, bad part of an otherwise good job.</p> <p>I shouldn't have to/don't want to experience this.</p> |
| | <p>I don't currently have the skills needed to do this well.</p> <p>It wasn't. I could solve this by taking a more positive perspective on it.</p> <p>This is a necessary, bad part of an otherwise good job.</p> <p>I shouldn't have to/don't want to experience this.</p> |
| | <p>I don't currently have the skills needed to do this well.</p> <p>It wasn't. I could solve this by taking a more positive perspective on it.</p> <p>This is a necessary, bad part of an otherwise good job.</p> <p>I shouldn't have to/don't want to experience this.</p> |
| | <p>I don't currently have the skills needed to do this well.</p> <p>It wasn't. I could solve this by taking a more positive perspective on it.</p> <p>This is a necessary, bad part of an otherwise good job.</p> <p>I shouldn't have to/don't want to experience this.</p> |
| | <p>I don't currently have the skills needed to do this well.</p> <p>It wasn't. I could solve this by taking a more positive perspective on it.</p> <p>This is a necessary, bad part of an otherwise good job.</p> <p>I shouldn't have to/don't want to experience this.</p> |
| | <p>I don't currently have the skills needed to do this well.</p> <p>It wasn't. I could solve this by taking a more positive perspective on it.</p> <p>This is a necessary, bad part of an otherwise good job.</p> <p>I shouldn't have to/don't want to experience this.</p> |

Now review this analysis. Where you need to build skills, schedule activities to do this. Where you shouldn't have to or don't want to experience something, decide on and schedule an appropriate action. Where you need to change your perspective, take a look at our [rational and positive thinking article](#) and take action appropriately.

Some common issues that you might experience include:

- Being too accommodating, and agreeing to take on more responsibilities than you can handle.
- Being too available, and being constantly interrupted by people who expect you to help them to solve their own problems.
- Not having the resources and support necessary to meet expectations.
- Dealing with office politics and stakeholder issues.
- Resolving conflicting demands from work and family.
- Not taking enough breaks from work, and becoming physically exhausted.

Tip:

If you're particularly concerned about these issues (and stress, in particular), you may want to investigate the causes in more detail. You can do this by keeping a [Stress Diary](#).

From Negative to Positive

Once you've identified the things that you find stressful and unpleasant, you can start to manage them. There are many useful techniques for doing this, including relaxation, meditation, positive thinking, and building stress defenses. You can read more about these [here](#).

When you want to boost your career, though, you need to do more than just cope with stress and unpleasant things. This is the perfect time to re-evaluate your current position, and to rediscover your commitment to personal growth and development.

Completing these exercises is a great first step in that process. The more that you understand yourself and what you need from your career, the better able you are to go out and create a work situation that is satisfying. This might mean changing careers, changing jobs, reshaping the job you're in, or steering the development of your job toward the things that you find most satisfying.

Whatever course your career boosting process takes, you will certainly need to find the motivation and drive to put your plan into action. That's what boosting your career is all about: sometimes it takes a little discontent to give you the burst of energy that's needed to change things for the better.

Tip:

If you're considering a significant career change, then make sure that you research your options properly.

You can get a good idea of the sort of jobs that you might find satisfying by using the MAPP test provided by www.assessment.com.

Alternatively, consider talking to a local career counselor – you can find these through Google or by personal recommendation. A good one will know your local job market, and will help you to make the change successfully.

3. Planning Your Future

Moving Forward With Purpose

If you want to get ahead fast, you need to know where you want to go. Otherwise your efforts will likely be disconnected and random, and your results will be mediocre. With a coherent direction and with clarity, you will be able to focus your attention on those aspects of your career that need changing, and recognize those that may just need a little tweaking. A boost for some may mean a complete change of direction; others might only need a small correction or a sharper focus.

However much of a push you need, you must develop a plan to move your career in the desired direction.

The first step is to look at your current position. You did this with the first exercises in this workbook. As a result, you may be confident in where you are now, and just want to accelerate on your current course. Alternatively, you may want to make a more fundamental change.

Either way, you need to set clear career goals to motivate yourself to move forward.

Career Goal Setting

You need to set relevant goals when you want to achieve something. This helps you to define precisely what you want, and gives you something concrete to aim for. By setting goals, you can avoid distraction, and get back on course when it does get the better of you.

Great goals are motivating and inspiring. And the best part is that, as you start achieving your goals, your self-confidence builds and you'll want to set and achieve more and more of them. This is where the strongest form of career-boosting energy comes from!

So, give yourself a head start, and begin setting some career goals today!

Set Long-Term Goals

| Category | Goal | Priority |
|--|------|----------|
| Artistic What do you want to achieve artistically? | | |
| Attitude Is your mindset holding you back? | | |
| Career What do you want to achieve with your career? | | |
| Education Do you need further education to achieve any of your life goals? | | |
| Family What is your ideal family situation? | | |
| Financial Do you have an amount you want to be earning or to have saved by a certain time? | | |
| Physical Are there health or athletic goals that you want to attain? | | |
| Pleasure How much time do you want for yourself, and what will you do with it? | | |
| Public Service Do you want to improve your community, or even the world? | | |

Action:



Use the table on the previous page to identify the goals that you'd like to achieve in the next 10 to 15 years. This is pretty much the furthest ahead that you can plan realistically, but it's also the sort of timescale that you need for goals that involve developing serious professional expertise in a particular area. (Research shows that this is the timescale needed to build real, world-beating expertise – as long as you work very hard!)

Look these goals over, and highlight one in each category that stands out as the most important. These are your key long-term goals.

At this point, it's worth considering whether your goals are realistic as a set. If you've identified major, demanding ones in a number of categories, consider whether it is actually possible to achieve them all. You may need to prioritize them (use the third column in the table on the previous page), and then scale down the lower priority ones.

For example, it may not be possible for you to achieve a high level of success in a sport, while also being a star parent, all at the same time that you're working toward getting a seat on the board at work. It will take many years of hard work to reach the highest level in your career, so you may need to adjust your sporting goals accordingly. But if your sporting or family goals are actually more important to you, then you may need to accept that your career will likely progress more slowly.

Tip:

Be careful with your family goals in particular. Many people end up regretting not having spent more time with their partner and children. Also, children benefit greatly from the love and attention of their parents if they're to grow up as happy and confident individuals.

There are many things that you can deprioritize, but don't deprioritize your family – it's such an easy mistake to make.

What's important is that you decide what your priorities are, and accept the necessary consequences of deprioritizing other things in life. By deciding this consciously, you'll be so much happier, more in control, and so much less stressed than if you try to "have it all."

Action:



Now, go back to the table on the previous page and prioritize your goals. Then, if necessary, scale back your lower-priority ones so that you can put enough effort into the things that really matter to you.

Tip:

Goals are more powerful if they are SMART. While there are plenty of variants in the meaning of the SMART mnemonic, it usually stands for: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

As we're focusing on boosting your career in this workbook, we'll now look at the next step that you need to take to achieve your realistic long-term career goal. This involves setting intermediate goals with smaller time horizons. What do you have to accomplish in five years to reach your long-term goal? In one year? In six months? In one month?

Consider the following as you come to define your shorter-term goals:

- What skills do you need to acquire?
- Do you need to gain formal qualifications?
- What experience do you need?
- What connections and contacts do you need?
- What do you need to improve on?

Because you're setting them for particular time-horizons here, your goals will automatically be time-bound. But it's important to ensure that the shorter-term goals are as attainable as the long-term goal you defined earlier, and that goals are expressed in specific terms. So, rather than say that you want to "get better at understanding finance," say that you want to "understand how our company balance sheet is constructed."

Action:



In the table below, write down the attainable intermediate goals that you need to achieve to make each of your major goals a reality. Make sure that these intermediate goals are expressed in specific terms, and that they will help you to achieve your long-term goal. Then, identify how you will measure when you have achieved them.

Note that, while you have a single long-term goal, you'll need several goals for the intermediate time-horizons. (The Appendix has four more copies of this table.)

| Goal Horizon | Specific, Attainable Goal | Achievement Measure |
|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Long-term | | |
| Five years | | |
| One year | | |
| Six months | | |
| One month | | |
| Next week | | |
| Today | | |

Make sure that you work toward your most important goals each day – this helps you to ensure that you are continuously working toward your lifetime goals. This brings your long-term goals out of the realm of the inconceivable, and into the realm of everyday action.

Establish a regular review process to make sure that your lifetime goals and daily goals are consistent with one another. (A good way of doing this is to schedule a quarterly recurring review in your calendar.) Modify them as necessary as your own priorities, circumstances and experiences change.

It's important that you set goals that are motivating. This is what will provide the boost that you periodically need. To set inspiring and achievable goals, you should:

- Write them down – this makes them real and gives them weight.
- Express them positively – say what you will do rather than what you won't.
- Set priorities – identify which goals take precedence, and what needs to be achieved in what order.
- Keep daily goals small – the smaller and more achievable your initial goals are, the more confident you will become in your ability to achieve what you set out to.
- Focus on performance rather than outcomes – sometimes a result is out of your control. Making your best effort is not.

Plan Your Approach and ACT

With your career goals set, it's time for action. Make a commitment to yourself, saying what you intend to achieve, why and how. Some people create daily reminders to motivate themselves to keep going. Whatever you need to do to motivate yourself, do it.

The time is now and the opportunity is yours. Career propulsion requires fuel and that comes in the form of hard work, determination, and a firm belief that you can do whatever you set your mind to.

4. Career Boosting Skills

Increasing Your Personal Productivity

So, now that you're clear about what your passions are, and you've set your short-, medium- and long-term career goals, you know what direction you want to take your career. Your strategy is now firmly set.

But how will you get there? We'll now look at a set of important personal productivity skills that you can start using right away to boost your career.

Job Analysis

Start by making sure that you really understand what your job's top priorities are, by carrying out a Job Analysis.

1. Review the formal documentation for your job, including job descriptions and performance review forms. What activities and behaviors attract additional rewards? Find out what training is attached to your role.
2. Understand your organization's strategy and culture. Identify which tasks in your role contribute the most to the organization's direction.
3. Find out who the top achievers are and why they are considered to be so successful. Learn the skills that get them ahead.
4. Confirm your understanding with your manager.

For more on job analysis, click [here](#).

Action:



Once you know what you **should** be doing, make sure that you understand how you're actually spending your time by keeping an activity log for at least a week. The results are often surprising!

Use the activity log worksheet on the next page to record when you're doing tasks; what you're doing; whether each activity is of high, medium or low value; and how much time you spend on them.

Once you've done this, you should then eliminate jobs that are low priorities or that you can delegate to someone else. Also, schedule your most challenging tasks for the times of day when your energy is highest. This will make your work better and quicker.

Minimize the number of times a day you switch between different types of task. For example, read and reply to emails once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Finally, reduce the amount of time spent on legitimate personal activities such as making coffee. (Take turns in your team to do this – it saves time and strengthens team spirit.)

Prioritization

You have to know what tasks to work on now and what to leave until later.

- Do you have a To-Do List?
- Do you rank the items and work on those with high priority first?
- Are you working on items of importance, or things that someone else would just like to be urgent?
- Do you feel that you have to attend to everything in your inbox, or can you ignore some requests?

These are just some of the questions that you need to answer when developing your prioritization skills. You can learn a whole lot more about this in our Bite-Sized Training session on [prioritization](#).

Delegation

Another way to free up time to work on your most important projects is to delegate some tasks. People tend not to delegate because they are uncomfortable handing their work to someone else. But, with the right amount of training, communication and trust, you can learn to delegate effectively. It comes down to three things:

- Knowing what you **can** delegate.
- Deciding **WHO** to delegate to.
- Developing a delegation plan that includes training, communication and feedback requirements.

Yes, activities do take longer the first few times that you delegate them than they'd take you to do on your own. However, provided that you choose the right person to delegate these tasks to, you'll soon find that you do less, and that precious "discretionary time" (that is, time for you to use at your discretion) is appearing in your schedule.

Action:



Using the delegation log template on the next page, think through your role and responsibilities over, say, the last week, and write down your most time-consuming tasks in the table. Then identify whether the task could be delegated and, if so, who to.

To learn more about this essential strategy for reducing your workload, see our Bite-Sized Training session on [delegation](#).

Managing Interruptions

Everyday interruptions at work can be a major barrier to managing your time effectively and, ultimately, to your success.

Action:



To manage interruptions effectively, you need to understand who is interrupting you and why. Record the interruptions that you experience during your day in the interruptions log template below.

Interruptions Log

| Person | Date and time | Description of Interruption | Valid? | Urgent? |
|--------|---------------|-----------------------------|--------|---------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

If the same people are regularly interrupting you for reasons that are not valid, explain this to them politely but firmly.

For valid interruptions, the following approaches will help:

- Pre-empt queries by holding routine update meetings, say every week.
- Make a time available in your schedule when people can interrupt you.
- Block out time to focus on key tasks, and use your voicemail or even Out of Office Assistant to let others know why you are not returning their calls or emails during that time.
- Learn to say “no,” politely. You have to respect your own time and priorities, so don’t allow an interruption to continue if you’re working on something important.

For more on how to create pockets of time in which you can focus on your high-priority tasks – while still working effectively with your colleagues – see our article, [Managing Interruptions](#).

Beating Procrastination

The sad fact is that procrastinators mostly work as many hours in the day as high achievers, but they achieve much less because they’re putting off doing the tasks that they should be doing (those that contribute the most to their organization and would therefore boost their careers).

Beat procrastination by:

1. Recognizing when you’re procrastinating. Are you spending too much time on low priority tasks that you “like”?
2. Working out **why** you’re doing it. Do you find certain tasks unpleasant or overwhelming, or do you lack the skills to perform them properly?
3. Getting on with it! Help yourself to do this by making up your own rewards, asking someone else to check up on you, identifying the consequences of **not** doing the task, and breaking the task into manageable components.

Click [here](#) for more on beating procrastination.

5. Ready, Set, Blast Off!

Put It All Together

Boosts are useful at various times within our careers. When you're feeling disillusioned or stressed, or think that you're failing to meet your potential, it's time to re-evaluate where you are heading and get your career back on track.

This is the essence of a career boost. Nothing is more motivating than knowing that you are surely working your way toward the career of your dreams. The challenge is to figure out what that is and then go for it.

We hope this workbook, and the tools that we referred you to, give you the boost that you need to take control of your career and re-energize yourself.

After all, there is no limit to what you can achieve. Dig deep, engage the thrusters, and prepare to boost yourself higher than you ever thought possible.

Moving On...

We hope that you've enjoyed this Mind Tools guide to boosting your career.

We've put a great deal of effort into developing this and our other material. If you have any suggestions about how we can improve it for the future, then please let us know at members.helpdesk@mindtools.com.

And, if you have enjoyed this guide and found it useful, please [let us know!](#)

The Mind Tools Career Excellence Club at www.mindtools.com/community offers articles on a wide range of important career development and personal effectiveness techniques, as well as podcasts and forums where members can discuss career issues and get the help and support that they need. Make sure that you use it to the full, and get the very most from your career.

Best wishes, and enjoy using Mind Tools!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Manktelow". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

James Manktelow, CEO,
Mindtools.com

Appendix – Goal Planning Worksheets

| Goal Horizon | Specific, Attainable Goal | Achievement Measure |
|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Long-term | | |
| Five years | | |
| One year | | |
| Six months | | |
| One month | | |
| Next week | | |
| Today | | |

| Goal Horizon | Specific, Attainable Goal | Achievement Measure |
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| Next week | | |
| Today | | |

| Goal Horizon | Specific, Attainable Goal | Achievement Measure |
|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Long-term | | |
| Five years | | |
| One year | | |
| Six months | | |
| One month | | |
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