

A talk for Careers Leaders

# WINNING HEARTS, *not just compliance.*

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The human work of embedding careers in further education

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LET'S START WITH YOU

# What does it *feel like* being a Careers Leader right now?



*Hold that feeling — we'll come back to it.*

WHERE I'M COMING FROM

# I've spent my career getting people to say “yes”

1 Politics

2 Events

3 Finance

4 Secondary Drama Teacher (!)

5 NYBEP / Careers & Enterprise Company

6 Higher Education Careers Consultant

7 Careers Leader in FE




*Turns out influencing people is the theme...*

THE METAPHOR

This is *Hyrox* — eight stations, one race.




 *You don't get through it on willpower alone. You get through it on pacing, and on the people beside you.*

## THE METAPHOR

Embedding careers *feels* a lot like this.



 *Relentless, varied, and impossible to carry on your own — which is exactly where this story goes.*



# So why does this matter?

*Because the structures were never the hard part.*

THE STARTING LINE

# Where I started — July 2025

**7,000**

students to 1 adviser

**0**

Careers Leaders in post

—

a service already burnt out

- Little clarity about what careers was for
- Low trust in professional services
- Academics stepping in where support was unclear
- A fragmented, inconsistent offer

## WHAT CHANGED

# New structures arrived



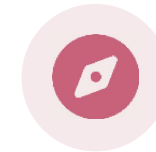
### A small team

2 Advisers + 1 Enterprise Coach



### A dedicated budget

Ring-fenced for careers work



### A named Careers Leader

(That would be me)

**But structures don't equal change.** *And change doesn't happen overnight.*

# What didn't work

## Early assumptions vs reality

- I assumed staff would welcome careers support
- Many were already at capacity, managing burnout
- The need was there — but the route in wasn't clear

## My early approach

- Leaned heavily on frameworks
- Tried to win people over with logic
- Took ownership of too much
- Got frustrated when change didn't come quickly

THE SHIFT

# What started to work



**Relationships over persuasion**



**Being visible and present**



**Meeting staff where they are — not where I expected them to be**

## One partnership became the catalyst

- 1 Recognised the good practice already happening
- 2 Built confidence through positive feedback & visibility
- 3 Informal relationship-building — presence, not process
- 4 Regular conversations to understand the real barriers
- 5 Identified a specific need: employability conference support
- 6 Co-created the solution: Sector Insight Days

A QUESTION TO SIT WITH

**What's actually made a difference  
in shifting attitudes or practice?**

## THE HONEST REALITY

# Embedding careers is cultural change

- We know the data and the impact careers work can have
- We have frameworks like the ILR that give structure and language
- But there is no perfect model for embedding careers, or securing buy-in



**Because what we're really working with is cultural change.**

It's slow. It's relational. *And it's often only visible in hindsight.*



“

If there's one thing I've taken from both Hyrox and this work... it's that you don't win by trying to carry everything at once.

*You win by knowing where to put your energy — and who is running alongside you.*

OVER TO YOU

**Before questions —**

think of **one relationship** you could invest in this term —

*not a framework, not a form. A person.*

**Then — let's talk. Any questions?**

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*Thank you.*