



# THE ARABESQUE CAREER: WHY STRATEGY BEATS GRINDING

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February 2026

I am no stranger to burnout. I have had many in my life as an investment banker working across the world.

The latest one hit me last summer. Reorganization uncertainty. Leadership disappointment. Energy that depleted in hours. I ended up taking a month off, wondering if I was still up to this high-performance, high-pressure world, or if my run had indeed ended.

The modern corporate employee suffers from a collective delusion: the belief that time spent equals output. How many times have you gone the "extra mile" just to finish a job? How many times have you **watched** the clock and said to yourself: *I am done for today—but let me check what is there for me to do?*

We have been taught to wear our commitment to a company as a badge of honor - starting early and closing down well after 5 PM. We have been sold the myth that an 80-hour workweek is the only path to success. Yes, I admit, it is a simple rule that everyone can understand, but is life truly like this? Is exhaustion the price of financial success?

I think we are looking at this in the wrong way. As we all know, life is not linear. We succeed then we fail, we go forward and then we take a detour. We pause.

**A career is more akin to an arabesque than to a straight line:** it is the beautiful sum of all the experiences we have gathered. No one would go to see a movie that has a simple, linear plot; we want complexity, depth, and beauty.

We know this really well if we look at our personal lives. Rarely are marriages or relationships straightforward. Instead, they are a loving chaos of confusion, where a simple act of love—say, buying flowers on a Friday afternoon—is worth so much more than a week of cooking.

**We need to move from grinding to strategy.**

We should treat a career in a similar way: we need to acknowledge that small but powerful acts are far more impactful than a 12-hour day. I understood this far later in my career: when I started to focus on what truly had an impact on my career or my team's success rather than the time spent behind a screen, two things happened: Not only did I start **working far less**, but I also managed to get back the time I needed to think and strategize my next step.

In the modern corporate world, where a new technology might put us out of business overnight, we must take the time to think and plan rather than just work.

It is counterintuitive, but a stroll through town to get a coffee can be far more impactful than spending time in the office. Your brain relaxes and starts to zoom out, looking at the bigger picture and helping you plan your next steps. Visionary leaders, from Aristotle to Steve Jobs, needed time and space in the real world to help them connect the dots and create the next big thing.

Skeptics will say, "*I don't have time for coffee.*" But you aren't taking a break to *escape* work; you are taking a break to *solve* the work.

To prevent your next burnout, try this:

- **Go for a coffee in the middle of the day.** Focus on the people walking about, look at the sky,



savour the smell of the coffee shop.

- **Go to a museum.** We sit on the shoulders of giants—even if you work in banking, a Basquiat might be more inspiring than a copy of the latest *Harvard Business Review*.

**The Hard Stop.** When you are done for the day, close it down. Do not fall under peer pressure: results are what matter, not the time taken to get there.

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