



# R&D CAREER TRANSITION WORKBOOK

A Strategic Guide for professionals in Life  
Sciences navigating uncertainty, job loss, or  
career change

By Jord Teeuwen



**Biography:**

QTC is the strategic talent partner for Life Sciences companies in Western Europe. With over 15 years of experience, we connect companies and investors with top talent to drive innovation. Our expertise in scaling businesses across Western Europe and the U.S., combined with a global network, provides us with unmatched insight into biotechnology, medical devices, and food sciences.

Beyond placements, we fuel progress by offering talent analytics, benchmarking, and consultancy to help Life Sciences organizations stay ahead.



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## Introduction: Why this guide exists

Over the past months, I've had countless conversations with people working in Research & Development; across biotech, pharma, and CROs. Many are facing uncertainty. Teams are being downsized. Funding rounds are stalling. Projects are frozen. In several cases, people are being laid off, some for the first time in their careers.

At the same time, the R&D job market is saturated. New roles are limited. Hiring is cautious. And for every opening that does exist, there are multiple qualified, motivated candidates competing for the same spot.

What stands out most in these conversations is that many R&D professionals are extremely skilled, intelligent, and deeply committed to their work, but were never taught how to navigate a job search.

People tell me:

- "I haven't touched my CV in years, and I don't even know what matters in industry."
- "I'm not used to promoting myself. It feels unnatural."
- "I don't know how to network. I thought my work would speak for itself."
- "I apply, but I don't get replies, am I doing something wrong?"
- "This whole process feels unstructured, and I don't know where to begin."

And these are not junior professionals only. This comes from lab techs, analytical specialists, project leads, and senior managers alike, many of whom have built long, solid careers but now find themselves in unfamiliar territory.

Through our work supporting R&D outplacement trajectories in biotech, and through speaking to R&D professionals for almost two decades, we've developed a practical, structured approach. We've seen patterns. We've built tools. We've tested what actually works; for scientists, not marketers.

This workbook combines all of that into one clear path forward.

Best regards,

Jord Teeuwen  
Managing Partner  
QTC





## Part 1: Reframe your mindset

R&D professionals are trained to think analytically, test ideas, solve problems, and improve processes. That's the same logic you'll now use, but applied to your job search.

Before taking action, invest in clarity, direction, and structure. Job searching isn't just about applying, it's about knowing where and why to apply. This first phase ensures your effort is focused and your story is consistent.

Think of it this way:

Scientific Process	→	Job Search Equivalent
Hypothesis	→	What role am I best suited for?
Research / Experiment	→	Applying and tracking progress
Data Collection	→	Interviews, feedback, rejections
Analysis & Refinement	→	Adapting CV, approach, messaging

This is your new experiment. You are the project lead.

## Part 2: Clarify your direction

Before you write your CV, apply, or talk to people, get clear on what you're aiming for. When you're clear on what energises you, what you want to learn, and where you want to contribute, your choices become strategic, not reactive.

➡ Exercise:

Answer these reflection questions:

1. What tasks energise you? (Experiments, documentation, troubleshooting, data, people coordination?)
2. What type of environment suits you? (Start-up, scale-up, corporate, GMP, non-GMP?)
3. What roles are you *not* interested in?
4. What do you want to learn next?



From here, define:

- A primary role target (e.g. Medicinal Chemist, Translational Lead)
- 1–2 adjacent roles
- Personal fit filters: location, platform, culture, company size



**Why this matters:** You can't communicate your value clearly, or find the right roles, without knowing what you actually want. This saves time, builds motivation, and aligns your applications with roles that make sense.

## Part 3: Write your personal pitch

People don't remember long biographies, they remember clear, relevant summaries. This is the basis of your CV summary, LinkedIn intro, networking message, and interview opener.

### **Structure:**

1. Who are you? (Discipline, years, sector)
2. What do you do well? (Skills, methods, tools)
3. What value do you bring? (Problem-solving, reliability, adaptability)
4. What are you looking for?

### **Example:**

"Experienced preclinical PM with background in neurodegeneration and IND delivery. Looking to lead cross-functional discovery efforts in a growth-phase biotech."



**Why this matters:** Recruiters scan CVs quickly. A clear introduction gives them an immediate idea of who you are and what you bring. Plus, a good pitch opens doors. It gives people something to work with, and someone to refer. It also boosts your own confidence when describing yourself.



## Part 4: Build a strategic cv (by role type)

Your CV should signal relevance within seconds. Think of it as a hypothesis, built around a core idea of what role you're targeting and why you're a strong fit.

**First, identify your role category:**

Role Type	→	Emphasis in CV
In vitro/In vivo Biology	→	Assays, models, reproducibility, compliance
Medicinal Chemistry	→	SAR, synthesis, platform exposure
Preclinical Project Mgmt	→	Planning, timelines, stakeholder coordination
Toxicology / ADME	→	Study design, regulatory interface, PK/PD

**Format:**

- 3-line intro (your pitch)
- Work experience in bullet points
- Focus on action + result (what you did + why it mattered)
- Technical skills section tailored to role

**Example: QC**

- Led pharmacology models for immuno-oncology programmes.
- Improved model reproducibility by 25%.
- Enabled preclinical candidate nomination.



**Why this matters:** Hiring managers read fast. If your CV doesn't clearly reflect the needs of the role, you'll be filtered out, even if you're capable. This step helps you stay in the running by immediately answering the question: "Can this person help us now?"

## Part 5: Build a target company list

Job boards don't show you the full picture. You need to proactively identify where your profile fits, and then work your way into those companies. Building your list gives your search structure and focus.

To help you create this list, you can use these tools:

- [Flanders360](#)
- [Bedrijven op de Kaart \(NL\)](#)

Filters:

- Location: commute, hybrid, relocation
- Therapeutic area: oncology, neuro, rare disease
- Technology: small molecules, mRNA, biologics
- Culture: flat structure, diverse teams, science-led
- Development: stretch roles, new platforms, leadership exposure

Create a list of 15–20 organisations where your profile adds value.

This is your “target map” the same tool recruiters use.



**Why this matters:** You'll use this list for applications and for networking, BD conversations, future collaborations, and interview preparation. It expands your visibility and control.

## Part 6: Become a “top of mind” candidate

Here's the reality:

Not all roles are posted. Some are delayed. Some are replaced. Some only go live after leadership alignment.

**Often, the preferred candidate is already in the network.**

You want to be *that person*.

**Strategic steps:**

1. Identify former colleagues, peers, mentors, CRO contacts, collaborators
2. Reconnect, share your situation and ask about trends: not jobs
3. Comment and show up online where relevant discussions happen
4. Follow up regularly: 1 message or check-in every 2–3 weeks
5. Position yourself early, before the vacancy is made public



Message template:

“Hi [Name], I’ve been following your team’s work in [X]. I’m currently exploring new opportunities and looking to move closer to [focus area]. If anything’s in motion, or if someone else might be worth connecting with, I’d really appreciate the pointer.”



**Why this matters:** These conversations give you information that others don’t have, how decisions are made, where change is happening, who to speak to next. It makes your approach feel organic and aligned, not random.

## Part 7: structured application + follow-up plan

Don’t just apply and wait. Build a pipeline.

### Day Action

- 0 Apply with tailored CV and short message
- 3 Follow up by message or call
- 5 Send a reminder
- 10+ No reply? Archive it. Move on. Don’t dwell.

**Track your actions** in a spreadsheet:

- Company | Role | Contact | Applied | Followed up | Response | Next Step

Keep **5+ second-round opportunities** in progress.  
That gives you realistic statistical odds.



**Why this matters:** If you only have one process going at a time, rejection feels personal. If you have 5–7 in play, your odds are real, and so is your resilience.

## Part 8: interview using star(r)

Most interviews include behavioural or competency-based questions.

Use the **STAR(R)** method:

- **S** – Situation: the context
- **T** – Task: what you were responsible for
- **A** – Action: what *you* did
- **R** – Result: what happened
- **R** – Reflection: what you learned





**Examples of questions to prepare for:**

- “Tell me about a time you had to troubleshoot a difficult method.”
- “Describe how you managed pressure during overlapping timelines.”
- “Give an example of when you had to adjust your approach mid-project.”

➔ **Exercise:**

Write 2–3 STAR(R) answers now.



**Why this matters:** STAR(R) helps you give the interviewer what they actually need — examples of how you work, think, and solve problems.

**Master Connection**

While speaking with the hiring manager, connection is key. You want them literally hanging onto every word you say.

How do you do this?

By contracting them while you speak and preventing long monologues or going into a tangent. Be selective in your answers and asking them things such as "would you like me to give an example?" or "would you like me to elaborate?". This will prompt them to acknowledge you and determine their need for more information. This way you know where you stand in the interview and show seniority by taking charge.



**Why this matters:** It builds connection, keeps the dialogue balanced, and shows maturity. It also gives you real-time feedback on how you're doing.

## Part 9: Competency prep

Common areas in R&D interviews:

Competency	➔	What to show
Initiative	➔	Ownership, proactivity
Flexibility	➔	How you adapt to changing plans
Teamwork	➔	Handling conflict or collaboration
Quality focus	➔	Rigour, compliance, documentation
Learning mindset	➔	How you upskill, reflect, improve

Prepare 1 story per area. Use STAR(R).

## Part 10: LinkedIn & visibility

Your profile doesn't need to be "branded". It needs to be **clear**.

### Checklist:

- Professional title that matches your goal
- 3-line summary = your pitch
- Bullet points under experience
- Follow 10–15 relevant companies
- Use "Open to Work" privately or publicly

Simple post idea: "Just wrapped up 4 years in CNS models. Exploring new opportunities in early discovery or translational biology. Open to connect."



**Why this matters:** People can't recommend or approach you if they don't know what you're looking for. This step helps others help you.

## Part 11: Interview body language

### Friendly

Smile

Eye contact

Lean forward

Open hands

### Unfriendly

Tight lips

Looking down

Crossed arms

Fidgeting

**Body Language Tips For First Impression**

DO's:	DON'Ts:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make eye contact</li> <li>Have an open gaze</li> <li>Smile naturally</li> <li>Laugh openly &amp; appropriately</li> <li>Keep your neck open</li> <li>Keep arms by your sides</li> <li>Show open palms</li> <li>Use natural hand gestures</li> <li>Stand up straight with good posture</li> <li>Stand with your feet apart</li> <li>Keep feet pointed towards the person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blink too much</li> <li>Stare</li> <li>Wear sunglasses</li> <li>Drop your head</li> <li>Cover your neck</li> <li>Slump</li> <li>Cross your arms while talking</li> <li>Put hands in pocket</li> <li>Have a dominant posture</li> <li>Fidget, bite your nails or tap your foot</li> <li>Put your feet together</li> </ul>

MINDJOURNAL

Practice by recording yourself, talking in front of a mirror or simulating with a peer.



## Part 12: Weekly job search checklist

Each week aim for:

- 5 tailored applications
- 2 follow-up messages or calls
- 2 networking conversations
- 1 STAR(R) story refined
- 1 job search reflection or break to reset

## Final word

This is not about being perfect.

It's about being consistent.

You're not starting from scratch, you're repositioning based on everything you've already built.

Whether you're a CSO or a junior scientist, this process helps you build momentum, visibility, and focus. It's structured to match how you think: test, learn, iterate.

Use this workbook to guide your structure, keep your confidence, and stay in motion.

The rest follows.

Stay visible. Stay relevant. Stay in motion.

You've got this.



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