THE SQUEEZE YEARS DECISION MAP

READ THIS FIRST



By Brooke Taylor
Executive coach and author of Healing the Success Wound

WELCOME TO THE SQUEEZE YEARS

If you're somewhere between 33 and 45 this is the phase of life where sh*t gets real. It can feel like you have to make multiple life-altering decisions seamingly all at the same time: to downshift or accelerate in your career, how many kids to have (if you want to have them at all, with a partner, freeze eggs), when to have them, how to save money while also paying your huge property tax bill, aging parents, health, dating etc. etc. The squeeze is squeezing!

END THE OVERWHELM AND ANALYSIS PARALYSIS

It can feel like so many decisions impact each other. You don't have to make all these decisions at once. The first half of this map helps you find that one and make it. The second half gives you something steadier than a plan: a sentence about yourself that stays true no matter which way the decision goes.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A MOM TO USE THIS

If you're single and weighing the same questions of dating, fertility, career etc., with no second income and no one else in the room to answer them with, the map works the same way. Some prompts ask about a partner. Answer them for your life as it actually is.

GIVE YOURSELF 30 MINUTES

Pen, not phone. Nobody is grading this. The only wrong answer is the one you think you're supposed to give.

STEP ONE

NAME THE SQUEEZE



Write down the decisions, worries, and questions that are taking up space
Just get it out of your head and onto the page.

CAREER

_____

_____

_____

_____

MONEY AND FINANCES

_____

_____

_____

_____

RELATIONSHIPS

_____

_____

Now circle the two that wake you up at 3am. Those are the real ones. The rest are noise that borrows their urgency.

STEP ONE

NAME THE SQUEEZE



Write down the decisions, worries, and questions that are taking up space
Just get it out of your head and onto the page.

FAMILY, KIDS, FERTILITY

_____

_____

_____

_____

HOME & LOCATION

_____

_____

_____

_____

Now circle the two that wake you up at 3am. Those are the real ones. The rest are noise that borrows their urgency.

WHICH SEASON ARE YOU IN?

STEP 2: WHICH CAREER SEASON ARE YOU ACTUALLY IN?

Accelerate. You have the energy and the runway, and the next 18 to 24 months could change your trajectory.

Hold. Something in your life needs your attention more than your career does right now. You want to stay visible and keep earning, but not climb.

Downshift. The job you have costs more than it gives. You want fewer hours, less scope, or a less demanding version of the role, and you're willing to trade money or title for it.

Build. You've been circling an idea of your own for a while. The question isn't whether, it's when and how.

Most women pick two. If you did, check them both and read Step 3 carefully, because that's where the conflict lives.

CHECK THE ONE THAT'S TRUE:

Accelerate: more afraid of plateauing than of being tired.

Hold: more afraid of dropping something important than of missing a promotion.

Downshift: more afraid of losing yourself or something important than of losing status.

Build: more afraid of regret than of risk.



WHAT'S REVERSIBLE?

01

DECISIONS WITH REAL TIME PRESSURE AND CONSEQUENCES

Biology, fertility, a lease, an offer on the table. These have a real clock.

_____

_____

DECISIONS THAT CAN WAIT 12 MONTHS

No real cost to deciding later. Take it off the table for now.

02

_____

_____

_____

03

DECISIONS WHERE I FEEL BEHIND

Because everyone around you seems to have “it”: dating, finances, kids. Where does comparison creep in?

_____

_____

_____

FIND THE ONE DECISION

STEP 3: FIND THE ONE DECISION

Look at the two things you circled in Step 1 and the season you picked in Step 2. Now finish this sentence:

If I knew the answer to _____,

most of the other questions would get easier. If I knew this decision it would make me feel calm, clear, and grounded.

WHAT WOMEN WRITE HERE:

- ✓ "If I knew whether I'm going to try for a second child in the next two years, I'd know whether to go for the VP role."
- ✓ "If I knew whether I'm staying in this city, I'd know whether to buy or keep renting, and whether to stay at this company."
- ✓ "If I knew whether I actually want kids or just feel like I'm supposed to decide, I'd stop treating every career move like it has a deadline."
- ✓ "If I knew whether I'm starting my own thing in the next three years, I'd stop resenting my job and start using it."

PART TWO: THE ANCHOR

STEP 5: FIVE YEARS FROM NOW

You've found the decision, the one that you want clarity on first.
Now your mind might try to second guess it, or overanalysze it.
You don't need to know how it turns out. You need to know what about you stays the same either way.

Picture yourself five years from now. Don't picture the job or the house. Picture her at a dinner table, telling someone about the squeeze years and how she got through them.

What she says she's glad she protected:

_____

What she says she wishes she'd stopped worrying about sooner:

_____

The one thing she says was true about her the whole time:

_____

Read your last answer again. That's the thing that doesn't change. Write it in one line:

Whatever happens next, I already know that _____.

WHAT YOU REFUSE TO TRADE

STEP 6: WHAT YOU REFUSE TO TRADE

Pick the three things you will not give up, whatever the decision turns out to be. Only three. If you pick six you haven't decided anything.

Being home for a specific part of the day. Earning at or above a specific number. Working with people I respect. Doing work I'm actually good at. Living in a specific place or near specific people. The option to have a child, or another child, without my career punishing me for it. Weekends that are actually mine. A title that reflects what I do. Being able to leave without it being a crisis. Something else entirely. Anything that violates one of these is a no, no matter how good it looks on LinkedIn.

MY THREE NON-NEGOTIABLES:

✓ 1. _____

✓ 2. _____

✓ 3. _____

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

THE ANCHOR SENTENCE

FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS, I AM IN A _____ SEASON.

THE ONE DECISION I'M MAKING IS _____, AND I'M DECIDING IT BY _____.

WHATEVER I CHOOSE, I ALREADY KNOW THAT _____.

I WILL NOT TRADE _____, _____, OR _____. EVERYTHING ELSE CAN WAIT.

You can't fail the squeeze years. **You can only choose, and then choose again.**

A note from Brooke: High achievers don't struggle to decide because they lack information. They struggle because somewhere along the way they learned that their worth depends on getting it right, on doing it all, on not dropping a single ball. That's what I call the success wound, and it's why the squeeze years feel like a test you can fail. Now you have a sentence that doesn't change when the circumstances do. Write it on a card. Read it before every big conversation.

If you want help making the decision, that's what I do. Find me at brooketaylorcoaching.com



ABOUT BROOKE

Brooke Taylor is an executive coach, speaker, and former Google sales and marketing lead who coined the term "Success Wound"—the pattern of tying achievement and success to self-worth that leaves high performers stuck and stagnant. She argues that the success wound is the root of all common career issues from imposter syndrome, to lack of career clarity, to burnout. She spent the last ten years researching this phenomenon and creating a five step framework to heal the success wound and find lasting career fulfillment.

Named "career coach to the elite" by Women's Health, Brooke has helped over 5,000 leaders at companies including Goldman Sachs, Uber, Coinbase, McKinsey, and Salesforce to build fulfilling, high-impact careers.

Brooke is the author of Healing the Success Wound: Align Your Ambition, Find Lasting Career Fulfillment, and End the Cycle of Never-Enough that comes out in May 2026 (Hachette Books). Her work has been featured in Forbes, Entrepreneur, Nasdaq, Business Insider, and Women's Health, and she has spoken for organizations such as the BBC, Google, Uber, LinkedIn, and more.