

Speak about your needs

A client who worked at a large bank told me he wanted to move to a smaller one. When I asked him why, he replied: "I'll have more opportunities for development there and a broader range of tasks." A few days later, another client told me she wanted to move from a small bank to a large one. When I asked her why, she said: "I'll have more opportunities for development there and a broader range of tasks."

Peter Näf

Zurich, August 2026

My response to both statements was the same: "Perhaps – perhaps not." What, then, is true about these statements – and what is not?

We humans are remarkably well designed. We possess something like an emotional early-warning system: we automatically attach either pleasure or displeasure stickers to our experiences. If an experience carries a displeasure sticker, our emotions ensure that we try to avoid similar situations in the future.

But where exactly are these stickers attached? To sensory impressions – often to the visible environment.

It's about needs

Emotions are reliable, but not particularly nuanced. If we have a negative experience in a large organisation, "the large environment" may quickly receive the displeasure sticker. Yet perhaps the real issue lay with the team, the leadership, or unclear expectations – rather than with the size of the company itself. This is precisely where the crucial question becomes relevant: which need lies behind my reaction?

The translation might sound like this: "I want to work in a start-up" may in fact mean: I enjoy working with motivated people on future-oriented topics. "I prefer an SME" might mean: I value personal relationships and long-term thinking. A preference for Anglo-Saxon companies may reflect a

need for performance orientation. Working for an NGO may stem from a desire for meaningful impact.

If you know your needs, you remain open to different environments – and significantly expand your job market. After all, a need can be fulfilled in various ways.

Evaluate your experiences correctly

I encounter similar simplifications when it comes to roles. During a personal and professional assessment, I asked a client whether she could imagine taking on people management again in the future. She said no, referring to frustrating experiences: unmotivated employees and a superior who bypassed her and assigned tasks directly to her team.

I played the good fairy and asked: "Would you be interested in leadership if you were allowed to build your own team and act autonomously within your area of responsibility?" Under those conditions, she was very interested. The conclusion: leadership interests her – under certain conditions.

Analyse your experiences carefully: negative experiences often contain valuable requirements – they show us where the sticker truly belongs. (See also the article below.)

We live in an individualised world – and yet many people find it surprisingly difficult to name their own needs. Practice, however, makes progress. Try it in everyday life: if your partner asks whether you would like a coffee, you might reply: "What I would really like right now is a hug." That is how you begin to speak not about the label – but about your need.

[#coaching](#) [#personalbranding](#) [#responsibility](#)

Please find further articles on career topics on my homepage
<https://karrierecoaching.ch/en/articles/>

