

Feeling Stuck In Your HVAC or Building Automation Career? Do This First

Editor's Note: This article adapts core strategies from "Feeling Stuck In Your Career? Do This First." from Forbes.

At some point, almost every professional in the HVAC and building automation industry hits a wall.

Maybe you've mastered your current role but no longer feel challenged. Maybe you've been overlooked for promotions. Maybe you're burned out from constant project pressure, service calls, staffing shortages, or unrealistic deadlines. Or maybe you simply know you're capable of more—but you're unsure what the next move should be.

That feeling of being "stuck" happens at every level of the industry:

- Technicians who want to move into programming or leadership
- Sales professionals who feel trapped in transactional roles
- Project managers overwhelmed by nonstop firefighting
- Engineers who want more influence or ownership
- Operations leaders trying to scale teams without burning out
- Executives questioning what long-term growth really looks like

The good news is this: feeling stuck usually isn't the real problem. It's a symptom of something deeper.

The professionals who successfully break through career plateaus are the ones who stop ignoring the feeling and start addressing the root cause. Inspired by career insights from contributors at Forbes, here's how HVAC and building automation professionals can get unstuck and regain momentum in their careers.

Step 1: Identify What's Actually Making You Feel Stuck

Most professionals say:

"I'm just stuck."

But that's rarely the real issue.

In HVAC and building automation, the real causes often look like:

- Lack of growth opportunities
- Poor leadership or company culture
- Burnout from constant reactive work
- Fear of changing companies

- Fear of failing in a larger role
- Feeling underpaid or undervalued
- Losing passion for the work
- Wanting advancement but not knowing the path forward

The first step is getting honest about what's actually bothering you.

For example:

Building Automation Technicians, Programmers & Engineers

You may feel stuck because:

- You keep doing repetitive service work instead of advanced programming
- You want to move into integration, analytics, or commissioning
- You've plateaued technically
- Your company isn't investing in training
- You're carrying too much field responsibility without advancement

Sales Professionals & Sales Leaders

You may feel stuck because:

- You're selling commoditized work instead of strategic solutions
- Your compensation no longer reflects your performance
- You're tired of transactional customers
- You want leadership responsibility but lack support
- You're chasing volume instead of meaningful growth

Project Managers & Estimators

You may feel stuck because:

- Every project feels reactive
- You're overloaded and constantly putting out fires
- You've become operationally valuable but strategically overlooked
- Your stress level has become unsustainable
- You want more authority but less chaos

Engineers & Designers

You may feel stuck because:

- Your work feels repetitive
- You're disconnected from the field
- You want more ownership over projects
- You're limited creatively or technically
- Your ideas aren't influencing company direction

Service Coordinators & Dispatchers

You may feel stuck because:

- You're carrying operational pressure without recognition
- Every day feels reactive

- You have leadership potential but no growth path
- You've become essential operationally but stagnant professionally

Service & Construction Operations Leaders

You may feel stuck because:

- Growth has plateaued
- You're overwhelmed managing people problems
- You've become trapped in day-to-day operations
- You're struggling with hiring and retention
- You're carrying organizational pressure constantly

Executive Leaders & General Managers

You may feel stuck because:

- The company has stopped evolving
- You're solving the same problems repeatedly
- Growth feels harder than it used to
- Leadership fatigue has set in
- You're questioning long-term direction

The important thing is identifying the real issue instead of masking it with "I'm just burned out" or "maybe this industry isn't for me."

Step 2: Stop Waiting For Clarity Before Taking Action

One of the biggest career mistakes professionals make is waiting until they feel 100% certain before making a move.

That almost never happens.

Clarity comes from action—not overthinking.

Many HVAC and BAS professionals stay stuck because they:

- Keep thinking about leaving but never explore opportunities
- Wait for management to recognize them
- Assume the "right opportunity" will magically appear
- Talk themselves out of growth opportunities
- Fear uncertainty more than stagnation

The reality is:

- The best opportunities often come from uncomfortable decisions
- Career growth usually requires calculated risk
- Momentum matters more than perfection

Sometimes the next step is:

- Taking on a larger project
- Learning a new controls platform
- Moving into leadership

- Switching companies
- Entering a new market sector
- Pursuing a more strategic role
- Asking for mentorship
- Developing business skills beyond technical expertise

The professionals who advance fastest are usually the ones willing to move before they feel fully ready.

Step 3: Focus On Growth Instead Of Comfort

Comfort can quietly become career stagnation.

In HVAC and building automation, it's easy to stay where you're familiar:

- The same customer base
- The same systems
- The same responsibilities
- The same routines
- The same problems

But long-term growth usually requires temporary discomfort.

That might mean:

- Learning unfamiliar technology
- Managing people for the first time
- Speaking more publicly
- Leading meetings
- Developing financial skills
- Moving from technical work into operations
- Transitioning from reactive work into strategic leadership

The professionals who continue growing are the ones who intentionally put themselves in situations that stretch them.

Step 4: Stop Assuming Hard Work Alone Will Get You Promoted

This is one of the biggest misconceptions in the industry.

A lot of HVAC and BAS professionals believe:

“If I work hard enough, someone will eventually notice.”

Unfortunately, that's not always how career growth works.

Hard work matters. But visibility, communication, leadership, and initiative matter too.

The professionals who advance typically know how to:

- Communicate their value
- Build relationships internally
- Advocate for themselves professionally

- Develop leadership presence
- Solve business problems—not just technical ones
- Position themselves strategically

You can be the hardest-working person in the company and remain stuck if nobody understands your long-term value.

Step 5: Build Relationships That Expand Your Career

Career growth in HVAC and building automation is heavily relationship driven.

The professionals who advance consistently are often connected to:

- Strong mentors
- Industry peers
- Manufacturers
- Contractors
- Engineers
- Owners
- Recruiters
- High-performing leaders

Opportunities frequently come through conversations—not job boards.

That's why networking matters at every level of the industry.

Not fake networking. Real professional relationships.

Ways to expand your opportunities:

- Attend industry events
- Stay active on LinkedIn
- Build relationships across departments
- Learn from leaders you respect
- Connect with professionals outside your company
- Ask questions instead of pretending to know everything
- Seek mentorship intentionally

The more isolated you become professionally, the easier it is to stay stuck.

Step 6: Trust The Process Of Incremental Growth

Most career transformations do not happen overnight.

They happen gradually:

- One certification
- One project
- One leadership opportunity
- One new relationship
- One skill developed

- One strategic decision at a time

The key is consistency.

Small steps create momentum. Momentum creates confidence. Confidence creates bigger opportunities.

The Bottom Line

Feeling stuck in your HVAC or building automation career does not mean you've failed. More often, it means you've outgrown your current situation.

The professionals who ultimately build the strongest careers are usually the ones willing to:

- Get honest about what's no longer working
- Take action before they feel fully ready
- Embrace discomfort and growth
- Build stronger relationships
- Develop skills beyond their current role
- Stay adaptable as the industry evolves

Your next opportunity usually starts the moment you stop waiting for certainty and start moving forward intentionally.