

YOUR CORE QUESTIONS

OPENING YOUR PERSPECTIVES

Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Many of us are so caught up in the financial rat race that we feel we can't afford to think about personally rewarding work. An underlying sense of anxiety and panic wells up as we confront the future—since we are now hopping from job to job faster than ever before. In fact, most of us are likely to pursue two or three careers within our lifetime. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the average 35-year-old has already changed jobs nine times or more. There's no telling which sector will suffer next from downsizing or belt-tightening, consequently requiring us to retrain and regroup.

At the same time, our hiring has been shifting overseas—in the past three years, the number of jobs outsourced to foreign countries

has tripled—so the competition for U.S. jobs is often fierce. Never has the message been so clear: To survive, we need to step outside the box and reinvent our relationship to work. A pink slip can strike terror into the hearts of the most capable professionals, and many people are biding their time—just holding on—in jobs that have become routine and boring. Yet, when I look at our current situation, I see more than a crisis: I see a host of opportunities.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGING WORK ENVIRONMENT

The people who make up Generation X, born between 1965 and 1979, joined the workforce with a different mind-set than did their elders. They landed in a global environment characterized by feverish competition, severed loyalty bonds, and rampant unpredictability. Since the 1980s, more than 30 million workers have been laid off, downsized, and rightsized. Employees have learned to innovate or perish. In other words, staying afloat requires them to take their creativity—and flexibility—to work.

Gen Xers are savvy about today's social challenges: how to preserve the environment, do business in an ethical way, and create products and institutions that will help build a better world. They see work as a continual learning laboratory. They assume they will make many different contributions throughout their lifetime and, in the process, they will perfect the art of reinventing both their work and their ideals.

When the Baby Boomers were broadsided by unprecedented changes in the workplace, they struggled but didn't fold. Perhaps the most prominent trait of the 78 million Americans born between

1946 and 1964 is their refusal to give up their dreams when faced with a volatile economy. Much can be learned from the resilience of these individuals.

Jack, a 58-year-old manager, has no intention of retiring anytime soon. “I need to make a contribution to this planet first, and I want to figure out what that contribution will be,” he says. At 50, Valerie, an accountant, says, “I’ve been working in a profession that has little heart. Passion will feed my next career move.” Pilar, a 43-year-old entrepreneur, wants to answer the question, How much money do I really need to feel secure and do creative work? “My answer will help me take back my time,” she says, “and do the kind of work that challenges me to grow personally as well as give to others.”

Bill Gates of Microsoft Corporation and Steve Jobs of Apple Inc. serve as inspirational models. They have rechanneled their strengths and expanded their vision over the past two decades, giving us technologies that have contributed to the economy and driven global change. Although they have certainly achieved both wealth and recognition, I suspect they will keep pursuing their individual dreams, leaving us a legacy of social innovation at the same time.

The Baby Boomers, once told to grow up, have apparently decided to grow up but not old. For example, at the 2006 Super Bowl, the sixtyish Rolling Stones were more than just rolling—they were rocking. Other famous Boomers—from Oprah Winfrey to Bill Clinton to Steven Spielberg—continue to raise the bar for everyone, showing that it’s possible to make new contributions at every stage of life.

The days when we worked for one or two companies and then gracefully retired are clearly over. Both Baby Boomers and Gen Xers are involved in a constant process of reinvention. A new three Rs—repositioning, retraining, and regrouping—now characterize the rules for everyone who works.

DISCOVERING YOUR INNER ECONOMY

Our attitudes toward money are changing as well. We're beginning to look less at the *outer economy*, which is driven by market forces, and more at the *inner economy*, which refers to how and why we drive ourselves. The core of my work for the past twenty years has been to help people recognize their inner economy—the values that are essential to their well-being. During this process, I've shown men and women how to bounce back after downsizing, find jobs that are better suited to their skills and interests, and even strike out on their own as consultants and entrepreneurs.

I've been called a Boomer poster boy because I was born in 1951 and from an early age had a desire to blaze my own path, inspire others, and squeeze every drop of passion from life. My dreams haven't changed, but the broad financial picture certainly has. In 1974, I bought a used Volkswagen Bug for \$600, filled the tank for less than \$2.50, and drove from Boston to San Francisco by way of the Nevada and Wyoming deserts and the Rocky Mountains. When I returned to Boston two years later, I sold the car, only slightly worn, for the same price. In my first job as a teacher, I earned less than \$13,000 a year and still managed to save a part of my paycheck. Today, I earn multiples of that amount, yet I am increasingly challenged to add to my financial reserves. Insurance fees, mortgage payments, tuition costs, home maintenance expenses, grocery bills, and so on loom large, fighting for and gobbling up almost everything I earn. No matter what our earning power is, we're all caught up in the same spiral of spending—both longing for and driving for more—and inflation. In 1974, the U.S. national debt was less than \$1 trillion. Today, it has surpassed \$8 trillion.

The way to achieve peace of mind in the midst of all this chaos is this: Don't link your worth and happiness to an infinitely hiccupping economic cycle. You'll only thrash around and then end up exhausted and in debt. Don't rely on the conventional wisdom that newer or bigger automatically equals better either. Someone will always be knocking on your door with a new idea requiring you to dip deeper into your pockets. You need to become your own sage, determining how to engage the outer economy and nourish your inner economy by holding on to your values and your sense of self-worth.

FINDING YOUR PLACE

The outer economy undeniably governs the costs of food, housing, schooling, health care, and transportation, as well as the amount of time we have to pursue our dreams. Not only do we have limited control over this economy, but we are also constantly bombarded—and frequently seduced—by its messages: Buy more, wear what's fashionable, drive the newest car, follow the latest trends, expect instant success. Within a single generation, our ideas about stability and security have changed, and we're caught in a rapidly shrinking universe where workers are hired and then summarily dismissed. Whether you do a good job or a bad job matters less than before. In this economic climate, you *will* lose your job, and you will have to redefine yourself more times than you ever imagined.

Add to all this the probability that you'll live longer than your predecessors, and you can see how important it is to take your dreams—and your creativity—seriously. Given ongoing advances in medical science, the human life span may soon reach 100. The mid-point age will then be a healthy 50 or 60 years. Will we be able to

save enough retirement money to tide us over for forty or so years? Will we even *want* to retire, or will we become bored and seek a new life purpose in a new kind of work? We Boomers have already rebelled against life's predictable, linear path. Every indication suggests that we will continue to reshape our lives by challenging ourselves in our 60s and beyond.

The AARP Global Aging Program International Retirement Security Survey report in July 2005 showed that 40 percent of global respondents intend to work in one form or another after they officially retire. Nearly 70 percent of U.S. respondents are interested in working during retirement. Shaping a better, longer life will require a good deal of persistence and physical and mental fitness and flexibility.

To find your place—to take charge of your job and career—you'll need to ask yourself, Am I able to move past the victim-of-statistics mentality? How can I create a spot for myself in a youth-oriented culture? If the climb to the top is over, how do I enjoy, earn, and contribute from where I am right now?

RECOGNIZING THAT WE ARE ALL SELF-EMPLOYED

In my book *We Are All Self-Employed: How to Take Control of Your Career* (2nd ed., Berrett-Koehler, 2003), I focus on the powerful belief that you can determine your own course and greatly influence the quality of your life by becoming your own boss. I don't mean you have to leave the company and strike out on your own. Rather, you need to view yourself as the leader of your life, regardless of whether you work for yourself or inside an organization.

Back in 1994, I was a pioneer in the field of executive counseling, which helped individuals zero in on the talents that would help them

build new careers. IBM, Digital Equipment Corporation, Wang Laboratories, General Electric, and others had begun dumping white-collar workers by the thousands, and it became clear that our old concepts of loyalty—and our visions of ourselves as being employed by others—were no longer working. So, I began to show my clients how to consider themselves self-employed by developing the kind of personal entrepreneurship that would place them in control of their life.

For the next twelve years, I taught individuals how to balance a new sense of self with the needs of an organization. We focused on how to become more self-directed and independent, as well as on how to collaborate with others. The idea was to prompt my clients to discover their inner economy—and to then find jobs that would allow them to honor their abilities by focusing on what they did best.

The teaching was revolutionary. People started taking their ideas to work and finding new ways to apply their ingenuity. Of course, such initiative shifted the individuals' relationships with the traditional bureaucracy. In fact, when *We Are All Self-Employed* was first published, one disgruntled executive told me, "If I caught my employees reading your book, I'd fire 'em."

In recent years, we've seen what happens when we put our values aside and let ourselves be governed solely by the bottom line. We've watched unscrupulous CEOs go on trial for their misdeeds. We've seen loyal employees walk out the door as they succumb to, and are unprepared for, company layoffs. At the same time, we've witnessed the tidal American job market and said good-bye to the fantasy of predictable and/or endless growth. Brink Lindsey, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, in his March 2004 article "Job Losses and Trade," states, "Even in good times, job losses are an inescapable fact of life in a dynamic market economy. Old jobs are constantly being eliminated as new positions are created."

Our plumber, Dave, once quipped that the only thing that lasts forever is PVC pipe. Dave says archaeologists will unearth PVC a million years from now and find it in pristine condition. Unlike PVC, human beings and organizations change. The job market and global trade are especially volatile, and they'll continue to be so for the foreseeable future. Forrester Research and John McCarthy (leading Forrester's research efforts in China, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, India, and Australia) in 2002 predicted that, by 2015, 3.3 million U.S. white-collar jobs will have moved offshore to low-wage countries such as India, China, and Mexico—a loss of about 200,000 jobs a year. So, it's time to become adept at reinventing yourself and your relationship to work.

My goal is to help you take on the mind-set of the successfully self-employed and use your gifts in a money-crazed world that keeps changing its demands. This book is for everyone who wants to work smarter, challenge the status quo, strive for quality, find meaningful work while giving back to others, keep on dreaming, and eventually make those dreams come true.

HEY, WAKE UP!

When our daughter, Gabriella, turned 10, she suddenly seemed so tall. As I looked back in the family photo album, I saw Gabriella, at age 5, on Halloween wearing a wedding-dress costume and, at age 7, licking icing off a mixer beater as her mother baked a cake. I realized that more than half of our daughter's life with us was over and that in eight more years she would be off. I vowed to spend more time with

her, working on the set of her school play, biking on the weekends, and planning and planting our vegetable garden.

Around that same time, I started exploring wake-up calls with my clients. I asked them to write about the moment when they decided it was time to seize the day and take what they wanted out of life.

“When I turned 35,” Yael said, “I asked myself how I felt and the answer was grim. Over the past few years, I’ve accepted any reasonable job that came along. Reasonable is not joyful. I’ve come to the conclusion that I’m the only one who can define my interests and then find the work that I love.”

Fernando said, “I woke up when the small business I had dedicated myself to for the past three years cracked open like Humpty Dumpty. I did everything I could to save it, working nights and weekends. I thought that just plain working hard was the gateway to my goals. Still, the company crashed and, as a result, I had to look more carefully at the way I was doing business.” Fernando joined another firm—part-time—as an account development manager. In his free time, he practiced drumming and worked on recording a CD with his bandmates. Not only were these activities fun, but they gave Fernando the perspective he needed to stand back and analyze what had gone wrong with his company. “That was a valuable time,” he said. “I needed to take stock of my strengths and weaknesses and learn more about managing sales and revenues.”

Greta, a corporate trainer, grew nostalgic as she walked into my office in a renovated high school. “These old bricks remind me of better times,” she said.

“What have you been missing?” I asked.

“For the past seven years, I’ve been training people who are required to learn. The company mandates training for managers, and many managers are reluctant to sit in a classroom all day. The bricks remind me of happier days, when I worked in an inner-city school. We made it so much fun that our kids really wanted to be there. We planned arts-and-crafts activities, plays, sports, and even water balloon fights.”

“Tell me more about that experience.”

“I recall two brothers who went home for lunch and came back with half of it on their shirts; a teenage boy, who loved rock ‘n’ roll and tutored younger students; and the kids who waited for me on their bikes as I drove the last few blocks to school so that they could race me to the parking lot.”

“How is this memory a wake-up call for you today?”

“I don’t want to go back to an inner-city school,” Greta said, “but I do want to work with people who want to learn, and I want to create an environment that encourages them. I’ve just discovered this desire as I’ve been talking with you.”

The recollection of work that you really loved can lead you in a new direction. But there are other kinds of wake-up calls. A random encounter can cause you to rethink your priorities at work. For example, let’s say you come across a homeless man slumped over on a bench. Others pass him by, but your heart opens and you hand him the sandwich you just bought for lunch. You decide you want to make a difference and reach out to others. Helping people will be a primary goal in your next job.

You might also get a wake-up call when a colleague offers unexpected praise. An offhand comment, such as “You have a vivid imagination,” may provide the confidence boost you need to pursue a new assignment. Many different experiences can wake you up to who you

are and what you need. An experience can be either affirming or unsettling, but the idea is to let it grab you and see where it leads.

REMEMBER, YOU'RE THE BOSS

Today, too many people see themselves as job seekers dependent on the vagaries of the economy. They are waiting—for the market to improve, for someone to tell them what they should do, or for the right job at the right level and salary to appear. “Maybe I’ll be lucky,” says the job seeker, “and out of three hundred applicants, the employer will select me for an interview.” If that describes you, then you hope for the best each time. You cross your fingers, hoping that you’ll get placed in the candidate pool, and then pray you’ll be the one to get the job. However, the chance that you’ll get it is less than one in three hundred—which isn’t very promising.

If you are still waiting around for that lucky break, consider the following:

- The economy will continue to churn.
- When the economy is sluggish, it needs your help.
- Waiting in line only results in sore feet and increased frustration.
- If you get “the job,” it’s going to be temporary.
- You can take charge of your life if you change your thinking from an “employed” to a “self-employed” attitude.

If you choose to be proactive and to stop waiting on good luck, you’ll have just promoted yourself. *From now on, you will be the boss.* You’ll be responsible for discovering what’s in your heart, for

reaching out to find satisfying work rather than merely settling, and for managing the tensions that naturally arise when you enter uncharted territory. In the process, you'll have to discover what kinds of support you need from others and what kinds of risks you're prepared to take. Nevertheless, this attitude will allow you to be the prime mover of your life—whether or not you end up reporting to a superior.

If someone were to tell you at this moment, “You are the boss of your own work life,” you might feel skeptical and scared, as well as a bit excited. Keep in mind that you don't have to dive into the deep end right away. All I'm asking for is your curiosity. Start to challenge your assumptions about job hunting. Explore what it means to be self-employed and take the lead in the process of your reinvention.

CHALLENGING YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Often, a job search is tainted by the wrong assumptions—especially by the conventional wisdom that says the bigger the salary, the better the job. When I asked Karolina, a successful sales representative, what she wanted out of life, she exclaimed, “Money matters the most!” as if the answer were obvious.

“Then why have you been out of work for a whole year?” I challenged. She had already turned down sales jobs in related industries because she couldn't “get behind the product.” As she sat there, she realized that she was parroting back the culture's value of the importance of money and hadn't fully examined her values and beliefs.

Many of my clients quote from the bible of the outer economy, which views the money machine as its deity. They allow this view to influence all their decisions and most of their career moves. They

hire me to help them find better situations, but usually they are struggling with a far more fundamental matter. After a while, their questions lead us to their inner economy—and to their dulled or pitted spirits. They have forfeited enthusiasm for burden, fullness for a sense of unworthiness, and hope for fear. Outer-economy fixes—such as a raise, a promotion, or a new wardrobe—assuage but don't solve the underlying problems.

Feeling financially encumbered and emotionally conflicted, these people are struggling to regain their balance. They have been repeatedly jostled off center by their inability to find meaningful work and to live by the values that matter to them the most. When I ask, “Will you describe the crossroads you have reached in your work life?” I get the following replies:

- “I earn a decent income, and it certainly looks like I have a great job, but something is missing. Will you help me figure out what's wrong?”
- “I've been overfishing the pond and depleting my resources. Can you help me replenish my enthusiasm?”
- “I'm feeling hollow, and work feels empty. Do you think it's too late to discover my passion and put it to good use?”
- “Sometimes I feel good about my job, but, at other times, I'm ambivalent. Is there a way to narrow this gap to more consistently enjoy and be productive in my work?”
- “I know that leaving my company—running away—isn't the solution, but I have a lousy relationship with my boss. Is it possible to shift my thinking and alter this relationship?”

All of these questions relate to the inner economy, which defines how we value ourselves and our place in the world. Such issues are

not addressed by books about how to manage your time, write a better resume, or get ahead of the competition. The answer resides in only one place—inside you. Only you know how your human spirit can be expressed—or stifled—by a job.

LIVING THE QUESTIONS

Over the past two decades, I've asked my clients: Are you willing to live in a state of ongoing crisis and just accept what you can get? Will you keep blaming your associates or boss for your unhappiness? Will you jeopardize your organization—including the lives of dedicated employees and their families—because you're afraid to search your soul and confront your demons?

If the answer to these questions is no, I move on to the tougher ones: Will you challenge yourself by opening new doors so that you can find a better way of both engaging your hidden talents and acknowledging the talents of others? Will you wade through anxiety to confront the beliefs that are blocking your progress? Are you ready to grow into another stage of life? Will you take a risk and let your imagination run wild, exploring your passions and writing about your dreams? Do you have the courage to engage the world on your own terms?

There are no right or wrong answers, and it may take some time to come up with honest and heartfelt replies. The point of my inquiry is to help my clients reassess their current expectations and beliefs.

Many of these people have been cut loose from comfortable and secure positions and now have to fend for themselves in a highly competitive job market. I've learned not to be afraid for them but instead to be curious—to listen to their thoughts and view all their

questions as part of a life-affirming exploration. For each person, the question that all the searching and discomfort boils down to is this: How can I create my future—take charge of my job and career—to have a more fulfilling life?

My client François said, “I find myself working at jobs where everyone’s goal is to make money. While that feeds my family, it does not feed my soul or allow me to feel good about helping the world. Where can I go from here?”

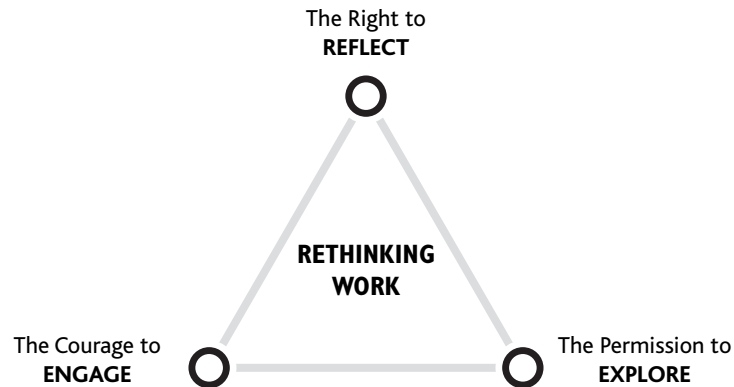
Freedom is earned, not given. It requires hard work and attention. And, it requires that you give yourself permission to explore your gifts and talents. In the process, you may discover a new calling or uncover skills you had forgotten or were compelled to leave behind. The Socratic dictum “Know thyself” is still extremely relevant in our modern pressure-cooker world. As philosopher Joseph Campbell said, “The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are.”

FOLLOWING THE RETHINKING WORK® PROCESS

In the remaining chapters, I will lead you through the Rethinking Work process (see illustration on page 16), which consists of three steps that will help you assess your goals and then manifest them in your work. Chapter 2, “The Right to Reflect,” offers a model for *reflecting* on who you are and what you want. Chapter 3, “The Permission to Explore,” presents a guide for *exploring* your options, networking, and defining the kind of place in which you’d like to work. Chapter 4, “The Courage to Engage,” focuses on *engaging* the outer world—testing out your new ideas and making a place for them in the marketplace.

This three-step process will serve you well at many of life’s turning points. The need for money will always be a reality, but you will

THE RETHINKING WORK® PROCESS



no longer need to feel battered by the outer economy or by a host of external values that may not be true for you.

After completing the Rethinking Work process, Bjorn, a portfolio manager, said, “I am moving to a smaller firm where I will be able to put my creativity to work and make things happen. The past year has taught me about myself and about what I need to do to be happy in my work and my life.”

Step 1: The Right to REFLECT

Questioning, Observing, Evaluating, and Clarifying

Spirit is what fuels your creativity and your connectedness to work. We often hear people say, “She has a great spirit,” or, “His spirit came alive all of a sudden.” Sometimes we think, “That idea has no spirit,” or, “That company lacks spirit.” It is something that we instinctively know is present. Spirit radiates warmth and enthusiasm. It is what

keeps us alive and vital and motivated, and everyone knows when it is missing.

Whenever I hit a slump in my work life, I take steps to restore my sunken spirit. It sometimes takes me a while to find the source of my discomfort. However, I intuitively try to do the right thing by going within myself for contemplation and reflection. I notice where the connection between my heart and my head has rusted. I investigate the reason everything feels wrong. I notice that even the most mundane tasks irritate me. I watch the mounting symptoms of low energy—groggily crawling out of bed each morning, spending the day watching the clock, and easily giving in to any slight distraction. When the progression has gone too far, I feel confined and afraid of being trapped. I ask myself, How can I inspire anyone if I'm feeling this flat and out of sorts? My question then becomes even more basic: How can I earn my living in this awful frame of mind?

We all have moments of discouragement and self-doubt, and they have something to teach us. I have learned that our needs and desires shift over time and that we must learn to have compassion for ourselves. So, I take some time to consider my present situation. I try to understand, not judge, my thoughts. I ask, What am I missing? What would make me bound up from the bed to greet my day? What spirit, or quality of life, do I need to cultivate?

No matter what our job is, we all show signs of rust or wear at certain times; but if we take the time to discover what our spirit needs, we can find a way to access it. Then, work will become enjoyable again.

When I take the time to assess who I am and what I want, I am investing in my inner economy. In this way, I begin to rebuild my confidence and restore my energy. I then have the resources I need to earn my keep and serve my clients. I want to pass that lesson on to

you and then show you how to move from reflection to the start of seeing tangible results.

I often ask my clients to make a list of the things they feel are missing in their lives. Kirsten, a corporate lobbyist, was feeling discontented and limited by her job. She wrestled with the question, How can I be successful and feel like I am helping others? She began to realize that she wanted to put her skills to work for a particular cause instead of for a company. Deepak, a chief operating officer, was out of sorts because he needed better boundaries. “How can I start saying ‘no’ more often and still feel that I’m respecting others and their needs?” he asked. As he reflected on his relationship with his department heads, he began working toward a better balance.

Reflecting can also help you see what part of yourself you’ve put aside to bring home a bigger paycheck. Larry, an organizational consultant, asked, “How do I stop drifting farther and farther away from my values and find my way back home?” He was no longer spending enough time working one-on-one with his clients. He’d become so successful that he spent the bulk of his time managing his business, and he felt cramped by piles of paperwork. The solution was to get back in the field.

A generous salary, raise, or year-end bonus can temporarily ignite your enthusiasm or bring a momentary sense of relief, but only by asking meaningful questions can you decide what qualities you wish to nurture in your work. It is also important to identify what dampens your spirit and makes you long to break free.

Giuseppe, a journalist working for a city newspaper, said, “My boss had a sign above his desk that read, ‘Beatings will continue until morale improves.’ The culture was ruled by fear. We weren’t allowed to ask questions. If I hadn’t been reporting and away from my desk most of the time, I never would have survived that atmosphere.

Finally, I realized that whenever I came to work, I left my spirit outside the door. In the past, I would sing or hum as I wrote my stories, but that wasn't happening anymore. So, after five years, I joined another paper and, to my surprise, I began to sing again."

The process of reflection encourages us to listen to our discontent and remember what it was like when work was good. Chapter 2, "The Right to Reflect," provides simple journal exercises to lead you through this step and help you get to know yourself.

Step 2: The Permission to EXPLORE

Researching, Seeking, Experimenting, Sorting, and Connecting

The biggest mistake you can make is to believe you work for someone else. Ultimately, we are accountable not to an organization or to a twist in the economy but to ourselves.

The second-biggest mistake is staying a prisoner of routine and remaining encased in your current world. To create your future, you need to become an explorer with the mission of determining what you know and what you don't. I have told my clients, "Your reflections won't bear fruit if you try to move them out into the world too fast. You need an in-between step to help you explore a full range of options before you take your new ideas out into the marketplace."

You need time to explore how you can put your skills to use, to test how they might be received, and to figure out whether your plan needs any refinements. You also need time to see whether the move you are considering is right for you—whether it truly represents your next phase of growth and the values you wish to contribute to the world.

Lisa was a psychology major who got a job teaching first and second graders at a private school. She also loved clothing design. So,

the goal she arrived at was to combine psychology with fashion by helping women dress for success. Her plan appeared sound, and when she was offered a job as a sales associate at her favorite boutique, she jumped at the chance. But, it turned out that she had little in common with the staff—and she hated the competition around ringing up sales. Lisa’s primary interest was in assessing the image the customer was trying to project and then recommending wardrobe changes to both reflect that customer’s personality and enhance her self-esteem. Lisa realized that she had leapt too quickly. She needed to spend more time in the exploring phase to test her expectations against reality.

In the exploring phase, you need to be like Sherlock Holmes and ruthlessly look for holes in your central thesis. This phase takes patience and the ability to run through different scenarios in your mind. I tell my clients this is the time to stand back, analyze the situation, and gather all the facts—rather than to charge forward like a superhero. Whereas the superhero leaps into action, the detective watches and waits. The detective is ever vigilant and extremely rigorous, and looks at the problem from all sides. If this process takes you back to your basics, that is okay. As Holmes would say, “I can’t make bricks without clay.”

Keiko, the deputy director of a nonprofit organization, returned from her vacation to find a pink slip on her desk. By the next afternoon, she had started the exploring process. She said, “I have better qualifications than ever to lead a nonprofit organization, but I could go in either of two directions: general management or fund-raising.”

Like most people who lose their job, Keiko wanted to get back on track as quickly as possible. “Be patient,” I said. “Don’t send out a wave of resumes this week. Take the time to consider all your strengths. Give yourself permission to explore the work world. Talk with others who are working in the kinds of jobs you think you’d like

and see what the pluses and minuses are. Then, trust your gut to tell you whether this type of work is right for you.”

Luka, a venture capitalist and amateur chef, started the exploring process and found a way to combine his financial acumen with his love for food. He discovered that many restaurants needed help managing their assets. So, he created a business named Food Ventures and started out by offering financial consulting to a local restaurant on a pro bono basis. He also helped the owner create a unique and profitable menu that increased the customer base and financed an expansion to a second site. While still working at his day job, Luka capitalized on this success to attract his first paying client.

It’s not enough to just think about creativity and all your great ideas. You must identify the particular skills that will be useful to a broader audience. You must find a forum in which to express your creativity and then give it a trial run.

“I think of my career path as tracking toward an unseen goal that lies over the horizon,” says Aziz, a corporate executive who is in the process of launching himself as a consultant. “It’s often better to slightly bend your life by making little changes that will bring you closer to your true path. One success will give you the confidence to take another step. The goal of the exploring process is to keep your balance and not give in to inertia and impatience.”

In Chapter 3, “The Permission to Explore,” I will show you how making a series of small adjustments can help you reach your goal.

Step 3: The Courage to ENGAGE

Focusing, Acting, Launching, Selling, and Innovating

Some people have a sweet tooth for taking action. They rush toward their finish line before they test their assumptions. That is why the final phase—bringing your dream out into the world—involves

learning the art of refining and adjusting your goals to ensure that your new plan will succeed.

This is the time to go over the details of your grand design and see whether everything is in place to support it. As Lily Tomlin said, “I always wanted to be somebody, but I should have been more specific.”

As I began to write this book, I looked up from my desk when I heard the clop, clop, clop of 10,000 pounds of stone being dumped onto my neighbor’s lawn. Later that day, I examined the grayish-brown heap and felt impressed at the variety of the stones—flat rectangles, irregular squares, cantaloupe-sized spheres, and triangular wedges. The next day, Christophe, the mason, dug a two-foot-wide, six-inch-deep ditch along the property’s edge and laid a pea-gravel foundation in the trough. Then, he eyed the pile of rocks and began to select just the right ones for his needs.

I felt deeply satisfied observing Christophe’s methodical, even-paced style as he built a seventy-five-foot-long wall that hugged the street and then curved around, like a boomerang, to embrace the yard. And, I learned a great deal about the art of turning a vision into a reality.

Before Christophe engaged in work each day, he would step back and assess the wall for the perfect fit, or placement, of new rock. This process of stepping back has been very useful to my clients, too. I told this story to Jordan as she struggled to find “the big picture” and identify the key elements of her design.

Jordan worked for an insurance company while earning her MBA, but she wasn’t sure what direction to take after graduation. She knew that she wanted to work with people as well as develop her business acumen. So, at the insurance company, she volunteered to help the human resources staff and began learning about benefits,

compensation, administrative and technical systems, training, and recruitment. She had good rapport with the recruiting director and found that she especially liked assisting in the hiring process.

After a year, Jordan applied for a job as a researcher on a special task force that consisted of managers and executives. She loved her sense of purpose and independence, but when the company was sold to a larger enterprise, Jordan didn't find the merger at all appealing. It was time for her to step back and identify the key elements of her next career move. Jordan came up with a number of elements she wanted her next job to involve: recruiting, research, contact with customers, more compensation, making a difference in people's lives, a collaborative atmosphere with minimal office politics, a commute of twenty-five minutes or less, and the flexibility to work from home.

Jordan wasn't sure whether she wanted to work in corporate human resources or in an executive search firm, so she lined up several informational interviews and also contacted people who had been helpful in her previous position. She asked, Would you tell me about how you use your day? Would you walk me through how you do your work? What most excites you about working for this company?

Networking can help you choose the elements that contribute the most to your overall design. Jordan's interviews helped her discover the kind of work she was best suited for. After three months, she had narrowed down her options and decided to look for a research post in an executive search firm. A company in New York soon offered her a job with a salary and a biannual bonus. Jordan had only a twenty-five-minute commute as well as the option to work from home. All of the major elements of her design were now securely in place.

RETHINKING WORK AS A LIFELONG JOURNEY

The purpose of using the Rethinking Work process is to increase the possibility and frequency of feeling genuinely happy and connected to your work. Rethinking Work is an ongoing process, not just a one-time thing. Life is a never-ending journey, and you have to keep choosing the path that presents the greatest interest.

At some point, you may find yourself feeling a little stale and disconnected. But, once you start this process, things will begin to shift. You may wake up in the middle of the night, write down some sudden inspiration, and realize that a whole new range of possibilities lies before you. This is when you may think, There aren't enough hours in the day for me to do everything I'd like to do!

Remember that you don't have to keep taking half-baked assignments or hopping from interview to interview. Once you wake up to the fact that life is fleeting—that you have only a limited time to make your contribution—you can clarify your strengths and decide what it is that you really want. Although you'll never resolve all of your challenges, things will work out for the best on the whole. You may begin to engage in a spirited, if not necessarily perfect, dialogue with people in your current company—which will allow you to bring a different set of skills into play. Or, you may find new opportunities in the job market that will allow you to forge a new relationship with the business world. Either way, you'll come out ahead.