



THE FINAL FRONTIER OF DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION

REINVENTING ME

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It was the great American author F. Scott Fitzgerald who ventured the opinion that “there are no second acts in American lives”, at a time, ironically, “when he himself was only a couple of years away from what many people consider [the greatest second act in American literary history](#).” In retrospect, it’s hard to be more wrong than Fitzgerald was in this prediction. It seems, in fact, as if second, third and even fourth acts are now an accepted of lives almost everywhere.

As a case in point, a young friend of mine recently closed a successful fishing tackle box manufacturing business in the United States to return to university to study computer science. I was surprised, as I always regarded his work as being exceptionally well-made, and he seemed to be doing fine commercially, but perhaps the reality is that “well-made” and “successful” in manufactured products pale in comparison today to the endless possibilities associated with anything remotely connected to our digital future. Our own daughter escaped from a surprisingly well-paid, but ultimately unsatisfying life in fashion to become a clinical dietician in several of New York City’s hospitals, and then embarked on also creating an Instagram persona addressing healthy living, recipes and nutritional wellness. This, in turn, has led to yet another transition into the world of nutrition start-ups. Our son-in-law has moved from one startup to another in a twenty year Silicon Valley career that has continually opened up new opportunities with each move, despite how different the industries have been. Perhaps most instructively, what these latter two examples have in common is that they both have prospered by taking chances, even when a specific chance has not worked out.

But reinvention is not always necessarily in the direction of startups and digital. The fabled *Financial Times* columnist [Lucy Kellaway decided to not only reinvent herself](#) as a secondary school teacher, but to invite others to join her as well, “Within a couple of hours of publishing an article in the FT announcing that I was retraining as a maths teacher and urging bored bankers to come with me, 100 applications had poured in”, apparently eventually reaching over 1,000 in total. The promise of reinvention had touched an exposed nerve in the minds of professionals over a wide range of age and industry experiences, despite the opportunity being accompanied by the almost certain reality of dramatically reduced incomes. Even Clayton Christensen, one of Thinker’s 50 leading management thinkers, has reinvented himself several times, moving from consulting to government (assistant secretary of Transportation), to running a ceramics company, before returning to academia to reinvent how we all consider innovation as a result of [his identification of the disruption phenomena](#).

Why would anyone make life more complex, rather than simpler? Why would so many “break it, if it’s not already broken”? The answer is in the allure of a chance to start-over, or to move on to a new adventure. Perhaps because of the acceleration of disruptive change, personal reinvention seems to be increasingly more attractive in contemporary lifestyles than it was in prior generations. Constant change, disruption, a fear of being left behind as one’s employer stumbles in the pursuit of continued market relevance, the desire to do something “new” or “meaningful”, and even as a strategy to cope with aging all appear to be encouraging more of us to wonder what comes next, and, rather than leaving it to chance, many are choosing to take action in reinventing themselves in order to maintain their own personal market relevance, employment attractiveness, or simply gain a renewed jolt of *joie de vivre*.

Organizational reinvention, while relatively rare, has been around for a much longer time than the “personal” version, and not surprisingly, whenever you speak of organizational reinvention there are always some who want to reinterpret the lessons learned and apply them to the individual level. Recently, we have seen several very interesting, and different, books appearing to provide helpful aid in doing just this. No longer does anyone have to invent their own reinvention approach; we can all apply “design thinking” to our own lives. While our conclusions will be individually unique (because of the individual uniqueness of each of our dreams), we can now all apply wisdom drawn from familiar disruption and design thinking dogma that should enhance our chances of arriving at something thoughtful, novel and useful.

The argument is clear: the rest of your life is too important to be left to chance. Just as any smart business develops processes for navigating unpredictable futures, so should you. The tools are here, and they are easily accessible and applicable. We, all of us, live in a continually unpredictable world where personal reinvention, no matter if you are twenty or seventy, is an ever-present possibility (if not necessity). Innovation is a lifestyle more than a discipline, and innovating the very essence of your persona is the new, next frontier.

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