

The Reinvention Guide: How Upwardly Mobile Minds Transcend Economic Downturns

By Elise Lelon

When you can't change your circumstances, consider changing yourself.

However humbled you've been by a layoff, whatever savings you've lost in your portfolio and regardless of the size of your home's equity value -- **you're still the one with all the power**. When, as now, headlines hammer home what you *cannot* control, remind yourself of the one thing you *do* control: *You*.

Rise up, opt out, and press refresh. With our economic world in flux, now is a low-risk opportunity to invest in yourself, do some reinventing, and finally collect on the ROI of you. This can be a modest tune up, or a head-to-toe overhaul. Either way, there's value in considering how changing you might change everything.

The Cycle of Renewal: It Happens to the Best of Us.

Think about it. The cycle of renewal happens everywhere in our universe. Luminous globes of hydrogen and helium, otherwise known as stars, shine for billions of years, but don't always shine the same. In fact, their appearance changes as they evolve through different stages of their lives. Reinvention isn't isolated to world economies and Fortune 500 corporations. It's par for the developmental course of adult human beings like you and me. Plato described this transformative human capability as *techne tou biou*, "the craft of life". Thomas Jefferson advocated revolution every 10 years to re-focus people's attention. Why not use this mind-blowing span in our nation's evolution to your advantage? Make it an occasion to re-focus your attention toward personal revolution.

Neuroplasticity: There's Hope, Despite the Brain Cells Killed in College.

Brains can help or hurt on the road to self-betterment. It's your choice. You can poke clever holes in opportunities that come your way. Or, you can convince your brain to buy into the "Brave New Me" program. Nuclear medicine's SPECT (singular *photon emission computerized tomography*) research indicates that the physiology of the brain can be changed. Modify your brain patterns, and you alter your behaviors and your life. Routinely talk back to the ANTs (automatic negative thoughts) in your head, and improve brain functioning. Brain scans at the Amen Clinic aren't in the cards for everyone. But, there are practical things you can do to jumpstart your personal or professional regeneration.



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Let's look at an action plan.

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E Exit to Evolve
I Inquire (Like your Life Depends on Data)
N Need People
V Venture a Vision
E Evaluate your Personal Barriers to Entry
N Navigate with a Co-Captain
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R Recalibrate

Here's an exercise for the sports-fan. Imagine yourself hovering over your favorite football stadium, with a bird's eye view of the entire field. You clearly see yard lines, sidelines, end zones, the bench and goal posts, and all the potential in between. Now, place yourself on the field, where you are today.

- 1) What is your positioning on the field?
- 2) Which game strategy have you been employing?
- 3) Are you close to the goal line and about to score, or have you been busy playing defense?
- 4) How did you get here? Is this an "accepted" placement or one you consciously chose? And, once you see your current placement clearly...
- 5) Where on the field do I want to be in the future?
- 6) What is a touchdown worth?
- 7) How can I tackle and pass to get that ball across the line?

E Exit to Evolve

Get lost to find out where you're going. Intentionally plan an exit from your status quo. Whether it's a weekend alone in a rustic Maine cabin, or the time in between "*my company went bust,*" and, "*what do I do next?*" -- carve out some time away, physically and metaphorically.

For guided getaways, consider structured programs like, The Hudson Institute's [LifeLaunch](#), The Hoffman Institute's [Process](#), and The Chopra Center's [Renewal Weekend](#).

Once you arrive elsewhere, shut up. Get quiet and ask this (gut-wrenching) question: If I died today, what is the one thing I'd regret not having done? If your current job situation and career plan directly or indirectly hinder, rather than enable, this deathbed desire, you have some editing to do.



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I Inquire (Like your Life Depends on Data)

Become your own R & D department. Recall the Delphic Oracle's advice? Take inventory of your technical and human skills, your values and priorities. Lay them out like a transparency over the slide show of your life. How do they mesh?

Do informal 360 degree feedback sessions. Talk to five people who know you well for 20 minutes each. Ask what about you has the biggest impact on them. Then, just listen.

Take a self-assessment like the Myers Briggs, the Strong Interest Inventory, or the DiSC. Note patterns and preferences in your behavior.

Remember what is effortless. When have you felt most at flow, as Csikszentmihalyi describes? Do your current job and career plans maximize what comes most easily to you?

Find your inner hedgehog. Review the three circles of Jim Collins' "Hedgehog Concept" in [Good to Great](#). Flesh out how they apply to your professional value proposition.

N Need People

Once you get to a certain stage in life, your ego starts saying, "Go it alone". Seeking people's guidance and support seems weak. Wrong.

Networking distinguishes a juggernaut from an average Joe. You already know it's a good idea to [never eat alone](#). As you're working up an appetite, draw an historical map of institutions, communities, mentors and bosses. Cast a net from country clubs to your kid's schools. Get people on your calendar for every meal you eat this month.

Get intimate with 5 people you admire. If you know these folks, get on the phone. If they're dead, or you can't access them, talk to friends, or read biographies. Learn their life stories. Decide your next step by following steps they took to create success.

Filter those who build you up from those who tear you down. If there's a loud sucking sound in the room when you're with someone, the black hole of need inside of them is draining your energy. Some people are invested in your not moving forward. Limit interaction with them starting today.



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V Venture a Vision

“Vision” might be overused these days, but dismiss it as a trite catchphrase at your own peril. Like the saying goes, “You can’t hit what you’re not aiming for”.

Review your data. Get clear on what you want. Put it on paper:

- (1) Craft a vision statement. Squeeze your thoughts into one sentence. Put it in present tense, as if you’ve achieved the vision already. Begin with “*I am...*” or “*I have...*”
- (2) Identify 10 action items that bring your vision to fruition.
- (3) Do what high school coaches told you: visualize the win.

E Evaluate your Personal Barriers to Entry

Strategize to effectively manage or banish barriers. With your sights set on your vision, consider obstacles that stand in the way. You want a path free of threats to defend against.

Call it a personal spin on Michael Porter’s [Five Forces Analysis](#). List what hinders your entry into “the market” of your dreams. Beside each barrier, brainstorm ways to overcome it.

N Navigate with a Co-Captain

Carefully choose a mentor, friend, significant other, family member, coach, counselor, spiritual guide. You are at the helm of this mammoth vessel called life. Your hands are on the tiller. Before battening down the hatches, and setting sail, put someone beside you. An unbiased, second set of eyes, makes the trip more efficient and enjoyable. You’re distracted by buoys and tide changes. Good co-captains stay focused on the charted course.

T Test the Waters with a Sip

The great begins with the small. If Zen Buddhists believe you can find the entire universe in a teacup, surely it’s worth taking a sip. Read an inspiring book. Take a weekend seminar you’re passionate about. Write a blog. Start a project as prototype for the work you’ll do in your next iteration. If it feels right, start making waves.



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In Conclusion

Here's what successful reinvention requires, and what it renders. Revamping yourself personally or professionally demands humility and resilience. It starts with differentiation, uncoupling yourself from your context. This is uncomfortable. Your deep limbic system and basal ganglia will get runs for their money. Next, in the integration phase, you merge with new ideas, systems, and people. Fragments of your consciousness, once conflicted, are now ordered and aligned toward one goal.

Reinventing renders a new composition, not only of your grey matter, but, of priorities that matter. You conduct life and business in terms of "what the condemned know", as Dostoevsky wrote. Hardship isn't as hard anymore, because it has found meaning.

In these uncertain times of failed fiscal policies and house foreclosures, reinvention promises homecoming. It solves the question: what are you *really* on earth to do? Having survived the trenches of excavation, you emerge rich. You understand, as Immanuel Kant wrote, "It is not God's will merely that we should be happy, but that we should make ourselves happy."

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