

Starting Over



A Practical Guide
For Reinventing
Your Career
In Midlife

RAJAN CHOPRA

Foreword by David C. McCourt

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ISBN: 978-1-7353812-0-6 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-7353812-1-3 (ebook)

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Dedicated to all who dream of a better life,
have the courage to change,
the will to persevere,
and the heart to give back
when eventual success is found.

Acknowledgments

This book was born from the desire to lend a helping hand of sorts and share insights, observations, and experiences to provide inspiration for those who may be struggling to find their way in life. I am grateful to many, many people who have been a positive force in my life, and who at one time or another were supportive influences in my careers and the writing of this book.

I am thankful to my deceased parents, Pramila and Ved Chopra, for having provided much love and the best education they could afford. I am thankful to my sister, Poonam Kapoor, for her lifelong, unconditional love and support. I am thankful to my son, Kabir Chopra, for his love, insights, and encouragement. I am grateful to Sandeep Mathrani, who gave me my first break in getting my coaching practice off the ground; to David McCourt for being a dear friend and mentor; to Rupri Puri for helping me get into a trading career; to Andy Carlson and Tony Hamer for being great friends and supporters; to Sanjay Sathe for being a great friend and inspiring thinker; and to many, many coaching clients who entrusted me.

The book would not have been possible without the love, encouragement, and unrelenting support of Trish Blasi, my partner in life. I am thankful to her. Finally, I am grateful to my editor, Samantha Mason, for expertly guiding me in the development of this book with thoughtful ideas and extraordinary editorial skills to make a first-time author's dream a reality.

Foreword

If I could think of one person to write a book on reinventing careers, that person would be Rajan Chopra. He has walked the walk by reinventing his own career four times in over four decades. He knows what it takes to remake oneself and shares his practical insights and wisdom in this book.

I have been described as a serial entrepreneur – in fact, Ernst and Young once awarded me their ‘Entrepreneur of the Year’ award. So, you could say I know a thing or two about inventing new businesses, as well as reinventing oneself. I have founded or acquired over 25 companies all over the globe. Reinvention has been key in my life. ‘A Total Rethink’ is a theme in my own personal journey, the title of my book, and a position not unlike Raj’s. I can say with absolute certainty that change is inevitable, to be ready and flexible when it comes is key, herein lies sound strategies for survival and a new way forward.

Rajan and I first met over 20 years ago, back when the new telecom and dot.com era was taking off, and there were huge opportunities in the emerging internet economy. Naturally, I seized the opportunity and started a new telecom company to build fiber optic networks to provide last mile connectivity for consumers. Rajan, at the time, was working on Wall Street, and I convinced him to quit his finance job and join my team as I led the telecom revolution.

When I heard Raj was going to write a book about career reinvention, I knew it was going to be spot on. After all, he has his own history to draw on. Both he and I have lived through

many career changes, both planned and unplanned, and only a person who has actually been there can explain what it is really like in a believable manner. Little did I then realize the timeliness of such an effort. *Starting Over* has never been a more important subject than during today's unsettling and turbulent times. Even before the current difficulties, jobs had been rapidly changing, evolving, and disappearing through the disruptive change brought on by technological innovations. But today, it is difficult to overstate the magnitude of job displacement worldwide where an exogenous event like the COVID pandemic accelerates the pace of creative disruption. Reinvention isn't just a nice-sounding idea. Instead, it is suddenly paramount to millions of people. Old ways of operating may be simply going away, perhaps for good. We are left wondering what will become of sports, concerts, and cruises. There are so many unanswered questions. Thankfully, a person like Rajan can interject some positivity into all this. He sees an enormous silver lining in the world's troubles because he realizes that disruption always brings new opportunities. As someone who has personally reinvented his own career no fewer than four times, he is a person worth listening to. His last career reinvention happened in his mid-60s. As he has both said and demonstrated, age is not important. The challenges may differ along each stage of life, but he has proven it can always be done.

This book is a practical guide to teach the reader, step by step, how to do it as well. Rajan has written detailed roadmaps outlining each key topic, from how to plan a new career, through executing that plan, and even how to handle both success and failure of your plan. Detailed analysis of important research is shown, backed up by pertinent real-life examples. He has many useful cases of what he and others did

during some very difficult and anxious times. Importantly, not everything he did worked as planned, and he explains what happened in those situations as well.

Rajan is overall a realist and does not sugar-coat the difficult parts. Having experienced transitions more than once, he knows personally that changes take time and how best to plan for that, as well as explaining ways to make incremental steps onward to eventual success. His is not a book that provides an overnight formula where you instantly step into a fabulous new career. This book is for the serious person who is motivated to put in the effort and work to attain the reward. As he freely admits, “reinvention requires hard work,” but with Rajan’s contagious optimism and life lessons at your side, at least some of the hard work has already been done. If your career needs a reboot or a big change, or even if you need a completely new one, you could do no better than using Rajan and *Starting Over* to put you back on the path to a fulfilling life. I highly recommend reading it.

—David C. McCourt Chairman and CEO of Granahan McCourt Capital, Chairman of National Broadband Ireland, and author of *Total Rethink: Why Entrepreneurs Should Act Like Revolutionaries*.

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Introduction

There has rarely been a more opportune time to reinvent your career than now.

Congratulations on seeking help in starting your journey to a new career because it can be scary and overwhelming. I will be the first to tell you that this process requires work and dedication but, in *Starting Over*, I show you how to overcome the challenges and reinvent yourself and your career. Your age and experience do not matter when it comes to remaking yourself. Whether you are a middle-aged manager, executive, life-long company veteran, or independent professional, it is never too early or too late to make a change and reinvent yourself.

How do I know? Because I have successfully reinvented my own career four times over a period of four decades and learned what works – and what does not – in the process of successful career reinventions. I went from being a broke immigrant from India to becoming an audit professional with PricewaterhouseCoopers in Sweden, a derivatives trader with JPMorgan Chase on Wall Street, co-founding business start-ups, and a certified executive coach at the age of 65. I am now enjoying some of the best years of my life. If I can reinvent my career and be successful, so can you.

In *Starting Over*, I guide you with simple, practical steps

on how to overcome the challenges that you face and remake your career to the life you desire, where you can be emotionally satisfied and financially secure. I am a certified executive coach and have spent a lifetime guiding and helping hundreds of professionals with their careers – young associates, mid-level managers, senior executives, CEOs, and entrepreneurs.

This book comprises essential principles and action steps that are simple to understand, which is the easy part. The hard part is in the execution of the action steps – the actual work that you must do when making the transition. *Starting Over* provides the tools, but it is up to you to put them into action.

For example, you may hire a personal trainer to help you buff up, increase stamina, or get into better physical shape. That is a great first step. While the trainer will be your accountability partner and cheerleader, design your exercise regimen for the gym, and encourage you to eat healthy foods, it is *you* who must do the heavy lifting. You must show up at the gym five days a week and religiously work out according to the plan. Only then, perhaps six months down the road, will you see the results. Without putting in the work, even the best-conceived plans will simply remain wishful thinking. It is the same for the process of reinventing our careers.

To be sure, reinvention requires hard work, but the process becomes less onerous when it is broken down into steps akin to solving any other problem.

First, recognize that there is a problem with your current job or career for which you want to find a solution. Begin by identifying what the problem is. Here are a few common causes for contemplating a career change:

1. Have you lost your job?
2. Do you feel stuck in your career?

3. Are you frustrated and feel stressed at work?
4. Is your career at risk?
5. Are you contemplating a career change?
6. Did technological innovations make your skills obsolete?
7. Have other disruptive forces negatively impacted your industry?

Causes (6) and (7), relating to skills obsolescence and industry disruption, are the more difficult reinventions because they usually require new education or training. And, these are the primary reasons why many will have to rethink and reinvent themselves in the future. But they are not insurmountable.

Tech-enabled productivity tools have been transforming the nature of work at a torrid pace in the past two decades. Old skills were quickly replaced by new, and those who could not adapt became unproductive and irrelevant.

The COVID pandemic, in addition to wreaking havoc on businesses and jobs, has accelerated and fast-forwarded this trend of tech-enabled innovations at warp speed.

For example, consider the emergence of remote working, i.e., the work-from-home phenomena. Its widespread adoption happened almost overnight, and it now appears likely that working remotely will become a permanent fixture of how a significant slice of the population will work in the future. It is still too early to fathom the total impact of this, but an entirely new set of jobs, careers, and businesses will emerge to meet the demands of the new future of work.

You have a choice – change or become irrelevant.

Why is career reinvention so difficult?

The simple truth is that it is *perceived* to be hard because most people do not know how to go about changing careers. It is the do-not-know-how syndrome that deters people. Overcoming that is the most difficult part.

People are conditioned to operate within their skill sets and training, at jobs and within an industry where they feel comfortable. They feel secure in their comfort zone, and stepping outside that area is, well, uncomfortable. Hence, change is deemed hard.

Many also shy away from reinvention because they are afraid to fail. But this is a misplaced fear. Is anything worthwhile ever accomplished without taking risk? Doing nothing, in the face of stagnation or obsolescence, is insanity.

Reinvention is challenging to undertake when we are comfortable with a job and paycheck. We are lulled into a false sense of income security and may become lazy and procrastinate in dealing with the inevitable. It is only when we lose our jobs *and* get the proverbial kick-in-the-butt that we spring into action.

*Rather than being reactive, become
proactive in making the change.*

For many, the fear of becoming irrelevant in the workplace may be their reason, their *Why*, for reinvention. For others, it may require deeper introspection to uncover their true *Why*.

The first step to reinventing yourself is finding the *Why*. After finding the *Why*, you have a binary decision to make. Commit to making a change and reinvent yourself or maintain

the status quo. What are you going to do? If you commit to reinventing yourself, you have already taken the first step. You have discovered the *Why* you want to reinvent. The next steps are to determine the *When* and *What* of your reinvention.

The timing of *When* is the moment you commit yourself, and that time is now. Discovering your *What* is an exercise in finding clarity about what is most important to you, what matters most in your life, and what elements you want or do not want. Finding clarity is an iterative process of thinking and exploration. To engage in deep thought and introspection, you will need solitude and a distraction-free space to take a holistic view of your life. Rethink everything. I will help you establish criteria that must be present in your new job or career to ensure it will fulfill you, and your career path will emerge. It does, when people commit to it.

After the *Why*, *When*, and the *What*, the next step is *How* to reinvent. This requires developing a thoughtful, realistic plan. I have you take stock of your skills, resources, passions, and aspirations and map out the action steps you need to take to accomplish your *What*.

Finally, I show you how to *Execute* your plan. I guarantee that there will be challenges. Some things will go according to plan, but others will not. Remember, a plan is just that, a plan. It is not set in stone. You will learn how to pivot and change your execution methods as you encounter challenges.

If the plan does not work, change the plan, not the goal.

I recommend reading this book sequentially because each chapter is the next logical step after the preceding one. At the end of each chapter are *Key Takeaways* for action steps that

you need to take. It is a good idea to make notes and refer to a preceding point to refresh your thinking as you progress on your journey to reinvention. Take the time to contemplate the *Key Takeaways*. In other words, do not rush the process.

Originally, I started writing this book because I too struggled with many of the same career challenges. But the arrival of the COVID pandemic, accelerating the disruption of jobs and people's lives, spurred the urgency of bringing this book to readers who may need help in reinventing themselves. Many old jobs have been lost, and many new ones are being created. I want to help you take advantage of these new career opportunities.

If you follow the guidelines in this book *and* put in the work – you *will* achieve success in reinventing yourself and your career. In the upcoming chapters, I show you the sequential steps, together with real-life anecdotes, on how to successfully reinvent your career.

Are you ready to take control of your future? Then, let us begin.