

REINVENT YOURSELF BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

Twelve Steps to Reinvention

A mini e-book

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1 Reinvention

There is a current television commercial by Wells Fargo Bank that describes how, due to a series of missteps, they have had to change their practices in order to regain the trust of their customers. They end the commercial by stating, “Established 1852. Reestablished 2018.” I point this out because this provides a great introduction to the topic of this ebook – reinvention.

Sometimes companies and individuals have to reinvent themselves because of mistakes they have made, such as in the case of Wells Fargo. Sometimes reinvention comes because old methods must give way to the innovations of the future, such as we see happening with many old-school communication companies. Finally, reinvention can become a necessity due to no fault of the organization or individual, but merely because circumstances change.

For whatever reason, virtually all of us, especially leaders, come to a point at which they are faced with the decision to either continue to do things the way they always have and accept the inherent decline that will come, or reinvent the way they do things to prepare for the future and its inherent possibilities. For organizations, it will be manifest in methods and practices, product and service offerings, their approach to HR, and the makeup of their team. Although there will be some sentimentality attached to the organizational changes, it is a well-accepted reality that businesses that want to stay relevant must continually evaluate their practices and be willing to change.

For individuals, reinvention is a far more emotional experience, because it often means evaluation and change of the characteristics that we believe make us who we are, and when challenged, we become unsettled, insecure, doubtful, and even depressed. We may realize that in order to move forward in our lives, we must make some changes, but putting in the work of reinvention takes time, sacrifice, courage, sheer will, and determination. It’s not easy, which is why many people will often opt to just stay the same and accept whatever circumstance they end up with. Change is hard. Reinvention is harder.

That’s why I am sharing some of my own experiences in the journey of reinvention and practical lessons I’ve discovered to be helpful along the way. I do this as an individual and as a leader of other leaders. As challenging as the process has been, I’ve had to force myself into reinvention, and I’m beginning to see some positive outcomes. I feel that my experience so far can be helpful to others, like you! So, I hope you will benefit from each “reinvention reality” that I’ve discovered. I believe they will help you when the time comes for you to reinvent. Here is one thought to consider:

“No bird soars in a calm.” Wilbur Wright

Reinvention doesn’t happen when things are calm. So be prepared to fly!

2 Old Dog – New Tricks

There is an old adage, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” While this has been conventional wisdom for eons, it couldn’t be farther from the truth for anyone who desires to go through the process of personal or professional reinvention. The very last thing someone needs to be shackled by is the belief that they are too old to learn anything new. Unfortunately, those who believe this about themselves are destined to decline into irrelevance, missed opportunity, and old age. It’s sad and entirely unnecessary. The essence of reinvention is learning new tricks – lots of them.

Flashback to when I was a teenager. Without going into much detail, I made a decision early on that I was going to focus on what made me unique and not be overly concerned with what others thought. Actually, that is the nice way to say it, because in reality, I became defiant in my way of looking at what others were doing and then doing everything in my power to do the opposite. If a group was trending in one direction, I went the other way. If they espoused certain viewpoints, I became vocal in my opposition. If something was popular, I chose whatever was as far from it as I could find. I was a rebel in my own way; I lived as Bishop T. D. Jakes writes, “Never allow the crowd to define you or confine you.”

I lived most of my life this way. It had great benefits as well as deep hardships, but it worked for me – until I began to get older. Then, and what seemed to be suddenly, I began to realize that “the crowd” was starting to dictate the opportunities which would be presented me. As I got older, I could no longer solely rely on my determined self-direction. “The crowd” was gaining power over me, even as I doubled down on being my independent self. Age bias isn’t right, and is advocated nowhere in my basis for living, the scriptures, but it has become an unfortunate practice in modern culture. I realized that I had to do something about it.

About ten years ago I felt the leading of the Holy Spirit to return to graduate school and begin to prepare for the day when “the crowd,” or at least a few leaders with an age bias, decided my value was determined by my age. (And, by the way, I wasn’t old by any standards.) Having not been a great student in the past, it was almost funny that I would even consider it. However, I went back, determined to buck “the crowd” one more time and prove that I could learn new tricks. Flash forward, and today I have earned my doctorate and am embarking on several related, but totally reinvented, ways of carrying out my calling in life. I am doing things that I never would have expected to be doing ten years ago.

I am not finished with my reinvention, but I’m well on the way, and I feel younger today than I did when I began this reinvention journey. I have learned that age is not as much of the body as it is the mind. “The crowd” may have thought of me one way, but I went the opposite. This old dog has learned new tricks. That is the reinvention lesson for you

today. If you find yourself in a position in which you need to reinvent, the first thing to embrace is the belief that you can accomplish new skills, gain knowledge, and learn new tricks! It begins with believing you can and ignoring the ones who say you can't.

Reinvention Lesson #1: Believe you can!

3 Proactive

In the last chapter, I wrote about how in order to reinvent ourselves, we must be willing to learn “new tricks,” and I briefly described how I returned to graduate school as part of my reinvention process. Today I want to touch on how when I returned to school, I wasn’t yet in a situation in which I needed all of the new knowledge I was gleaning from my studies. I was fully employed and succeeding in my field. On the surface, everything looked great, so why go back to school and shift my focus? As I said previously, I felt the leading of the Spirit to go back. I became very aware that while things were okay for the moment, I was going to need a new, reinvented, professional self to emerge in the future. It was only a matter of time before I would need a new set of skills and practices to utilize who I was, what I cared about, and the gifts and talents I possessed. I discovered that in my specialization at the time, I had a shelf life.

There is an old saying: “It wasn’t raining when Noah began to build the ark.” How very true! Noah had been given the inside scoop that an ark would be needed, so he began to build one, even in the face of great criticism. He was proactive about his future, just as I was when I returned to school. I knew that it was only a matter of time before it started to rain, and sure enough, eventually the clouds opened and I got wet, but I was ready for it!

T. D. Jakes has stated, “You cannot play with cards you haven’t been dealt.” This is true, and can be applied to many aspects of being a reinvented leader. However, I argue that even though you may be sitting at the table with a certain hand of cards, there is nothing stopping you from joining another table, or another, or another. If you don’t like your hand, you can even go buy a whole new deck! That’s what you must do when you are reinventing yourself. Change hands. Change tables. Change decks. And do it before you need to. Be proactive and prepare for the future storm before the clouds begin to open.

Here’s one more rain analogy. My family has a history of going to theme parks and getting soaked. We never seem to judge the weather correctly and the rain pours down on us. Each time, we’ll have a discussion about how we should have been prepared. One time, once we got home, I went out and bought a set of ponchos for the next time, promptly to forget to bring them later! Just recently we were on vacation, and at a store the day before we had tickets to a park, we passed by a display of ponchos. We discussed if we should have them with us, but we talked ourselves out of the expense and arrived at the park the next morning without rain gear of any sort. As is our pattern, within a few minutes it began to sprinkle, then rain, then pour! We had done it to ourselves again. Due to the excessive storm, we ducked into one of the park’s souvenir shops and bought ponchos for the family at a considerably higher price than the ones we’d seen the day before! Once again, we should have been prepared!

As you reinvent, you will need to be proactive and prepare long before circumstances demand it. Do as Noah did and begin to build your ark long before you need it.

Reinvention Lesson #2: Be proactive.

4 Vision

I've spent the last few chapters introducing the topic of reinvention as it relates to our professional, personal, and leadership lives. We've discussed how the need for reinvention, more often than not, is the result of a change in external circumstances about which we have little control, and that we must be proactive about its inevitability and embrace the belief that we can, indeed, become a whole new version of ourselves. As you can imagine, my reinvention journey has been a process of learning and reshaping my mind to think about things that I didn't see as necessary when I was younger. I've done a ton of reading and writing as I continue to create a new me that includes some of the best traits of my youth, but also expands my perspective, which has become more open to new concepts and critical thinking, which I never imagined would happen.

A few years back, John Tarnoff, of the Reinvention Group LLC, wrote of the "beginner's mind," which is a Buddhist expression describing "someone who approaches new situations with openness, willingness, and humility." He states, "Curious leaders are always interested in learning and understanding more." This has absolutely been my experience in reinvention. In order to become the next generation of our best selves, we must be open, willing, and humble, beginning, I add, with a vision of who we can become and what we can learn to understand. Supporting this is another writer whom I've enjoyed, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, who stated, "We must develop a compelling vision of later life, one that does not assume a trajectory of decline, but recognizes this as a time of potential change, growth, and new learning, a time when our courage gives us hope."

There are many important principles in the writing of both of these authors, but right now, let's focus on vision. Today's key lesson for reinvention is that before we can do the hard work to reinvent ourselves, we must have a vision of who we will become and where we want to go. I do an exercise with the students in my introductory leadership courses in which they must write out a detailed description of their leadership profile fifteen years into the future. In the assignment, they must describe every aspect of how they will be functioning, from basic daily events to bold new professional adventures, and how they will be feeling about who they have become. For those who really grab hold of the exercise, it is life-changing, because the vision of tomorrow begins to direct the behaviors of today. It's an exercise that I have personally done and continually update. It's been amazing to me to see how my vision, written long ago, is in the process of becoming a reality. Certainly not everything has worked out exactly the way I thought it would, but since this is a living document, it has plenty of room to flex with the new circumstances that sometimes suddenly appear.

To reinvent, we must start with a vision of what our reinvented self looks like.

Reinvention Lesson #3: Begin with a vision.

5 Grit and Patience

If you have read this far, you know that I'm encouraging you to respond to changing circumstances in your personal and professional lives by being proactive, visionary, and confident that you can learn new tricks in order to move boldly into the next adventure in your life. You also know that I'm not only encouraging you to do, but I am doing the same. I'm actually preaching to the choir (director)!

My favorite movie is Rocky, and I have quoted the dialogue and themes many times over the years. Within the past couple of years, a favorite excerpt has been the time when Rocky's manager barks to him, "The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place and I don't care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard you hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done!"

I bring this up because a big part of the reinvention process is sheer grit. How much can you take? How many times will you get back up after being knocked down? How many times will you look your nemesis in the eye and say "You ain't so bad" (another Rocky reference from Rocky III)? If we are to reinvent ourselves and live the next chapter of our lives with joy and enthusiasm, we must sometimes fight our way through adversity, uncertainty, and the relentless blows to our confidence as we attempt to become something we've never been, or a merely a newer, better version of who we are. This will take grit, manifested just like in the Rocky movies. You know the scene. Rocky is getting beat up in the final fight of any of the movies by an opponent who seems unbeatable. It looks like he is done. Then the theme song starts to play and Rocky does the very thing he needs to do. He gets mad. He digs into his grit and pulls out another win, another title, another championship.

One of my favorite popular writers is Bishop T. D. Jakes. He reminds us of something that Rocky demonstrates each time he enters that final fight – patience. Reinvention requires not only grit, but also a tremendous amount of patience. Jakes reminds us, "Just because you have to wait for it doesn't mean that it isn't coming." These are great words to remember in our reinvention process. We must be determined, patient, and take on every opponent with grit.

Bishop Jakes encourages us with these words, "I don't care how old you are, what you've been through, or how many battles you feel like you've lost: It's never too late to win the war. Repositioning [reinvention] will require you to rekindle the cold ashes of what was once your fiery passion. You will have to allow yourself to hope again."

Reinvention Lesson #4: You must have grit and patience.

6 Determination

Yuri Bashmet was born in 1953 and is a Ukrainian-born, world-class violist. He is known to produce a unique blend of impulsive daring as well as musical sensitivity that is simply breathtaking. Yuri revamped the viola's repertoire and image through his world tours and his spicy performances of new works by Mark-Anthony Turnage, Gubaidulina and Schnittke. He has since set up his very own string ensemble called the Moscow Soloists, where he is a part-time conductor.

I tell you this in order to make a point about reinvention. I can guarantee that Yuri did not wake up one morning and say to himself, "Today I will become one of the best violists the world has ever known." While there may have been a defining moment in which he committed himself to this goal, it did not happen on that day, or the next, or the next. Transforming himself into the virtuoso he became took many long years of practice, dedication, and persistence. The old saying "Rome wasn't built in a day" is true for empires, world-class musicians, and anyone who seeks to reinvent themselves. As author John Tarnoff states, "It is not an event, but a process."

The lesson for today is that after one has made the decision to transform themselves, they must be ready for the process to take much longer and be much harder than they ever expected. Reinvention will not happen overnight, but rather by embarking on a journey of difficult pathways, uncertain destinations, volatile circumstances, limited resources, fair-weather friends, broken promises, and a personal battle with fear and doubt. Reinvention is most certainly not for the faint of heart, but for those who are willing to confront their fears and overcome uncertainty, a new version of life, as they know it, awaits. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot describes people who reinvent their lives as "border crossers who let go of the fear of the unknown and the fear of failure," and Steve Donahue speaks of crossing borders on his journey across the Sahara Desert in his book *Shifting Sands* as "significant turning points, moments of truth, and opportunities for quantum inner growth and healing." To repeat myself, reinvention is not for the faint of heart and will take much longer and be much harder than expected.

Just as a world-class musician will spend a lifetime perfecting their ability to master an instrument, we who are reinventing ourselves must have the patience and determination to be in our reinvention journey for the long haul. We must let go of thinking it will be quick and easy. As my mentor Derric Johnson states, "Easy doesn't do it – never has, never will." However, the transformation will come if we don't give up. As Donahue states, "All that mattered was heading in the right direction."

Reinvention Lesson #5: Expect it to take longer and be harder than you thought.

7 Humility

In the rest of this book, I will continue to present many steps that you and I must be willing to take in order to make headway on our journey to a new and better self. Concurrent with my study and application of the reinvention process has been my study of humble leadership, so here I intentionally intersect the two topics. Reinvention must include embracing humility as part of the formula. I believe the better self will not happen without becoming a humbler self. In her terrific book, *The Third Chapter: Passion, Risk, and Adventure in the 25 years After 50*, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot states, “I traded my bravado for a new humility. I admitted I didn’t know everything. I started from the bottom. I worked those new muscles.” I entirely agree because that has been my experience as well. In the following excerpt from my book, *The Humility Factor*, you will see how my own understanding resonates with Sara’s. I encourage you to seek humility in your reinvention journey as well.

Lessons

In the book of Isaiah, it states, “The haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day” (2:17). I cannot think of a better way to describe my personal story. Throughout my life, I have been blessed with talents and abilities to make things happen which made me haughty and prideful. I’ve enjoyed success only to eventually be consumed by my own ego and sense of privileged entitlement. God has been gracious to allow me to rebound and rebuild several times; however, my pattern has been to return to old habits, when I believed that I was the cause of the good things in my life and ministry instead of Him. I guess I am a very slow learner. In the book *7 Tips for Finding Humility*, McKeever wrote, “in the ministry, few people are as full of themselves as young pastors who have achieved acclaim early.” That was me, but the author goes on to say, but “no one in ministry ever amounts to anything without being broken at some point.” That is also me: broken, but hopeful that I will remain on my humility journey and “amount” to something.

I am once again reinventing myself; however, this time around from a much more humble point of reference. I still believe that I can contribute, but I will be careful as to how I go about doing so, and especially how I feel about my own efforts and who should get the credit. In light of the seven signs of humility (compassion, sacrificial service, openness, brokenness, self-awareness, forgiveness, & gratitude), I will not be bold and stupid enough to say that I have mastered them all and have arrived at the destination of humble intelligence. However, I do believe I am on the way more than I ever have been.

My humility journey is not over. In fact, it is far from it, as I have so much more to learn and need to continue to grow in so many ways. As I continue on this journey, I will hold onto scripture,

"Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you," declares the Lord. (2 Chronicles 34:27)

I haven't actually torn my clothing, but I have shed plenty of tears. It is comforting that I can be assured that God has heard me.

Reinvention lesson #6: Be humble.

8 Letting Go

We've spent the last seven chapters talking about reinvention and the need to make some changes in our lives in order to get on with whatever is next for us. Bishop T. D. Jakes states, "In life we can correct the problem by no longer expending our greatest effort in the wrong places." You may say, "Wait a minute. I've had a lot of success working in my current place of employment and career. How could it be the 'wrong place'?" That's where our previous discussions come in. We're talking about how sometimes you can be going along quite well and then suddenly the road stops, the rug is pulled out, or, in a moment, you've become yesterday's news. Your right place suddenly becomes the wrong place, so instead of continuing to give it your best effort, you've got to stop and find the new right place!

This is easier said than done. Sure, we can all find a new job, career, or place to reinvent ourselves, but as hard as finding those may be, they aren't the hardest things to do. Reinvention requires not only physical changes, but mental and emotional changes, too, and when we suddenly must switch gears and put our efforts into new ventures and transformed identities, we often find ourselves hanging on emotionally to what used to be our sweet spot. As difficult as it can be, though, we must let go of what we once loved.

Anatole France stated, "What we leave behind us is part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another." Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot described this feeling of the death of a life once lived and loved:

The transition – sometimes abrupt and at other times protracted – is usually a time of fear, ambivalence, and chaos, during which it is hard to articulate where you are heading or how you will get there, and life feels out of balance and unfocused.

Each of these writers is correct. The process of reinvention is very much the death of one life in favor of another, but it is often thrust upon us unwillingly, causing much angst and fear. Still, if we are to reinvent, we must accept that it is a necessary part of the process. Reinvention requires letting go of what you loved and grieving its loss before you can grab hold of the new life ahead.

John Tarnoff stated, "Processing a loss takes time. But the productive course of action is to move as quickly as possible from protesting the loss and blaming yourself or others to turning the situation to your advantage." Again, this is easier said than done. No two people grieve exactly alike and everyone will take a different amount of time to get through the process and complete their reinvention. However, it can and will be accomplished by getting to the point of letting go of the past, even a great one that suddenly came to an end, and striving to go forward to the better life ahead.

Reinvention Lesson #7: Let go.

9 The Uncertainty of It All

Anyone who has gone through a personal or professional reinvention understands that a constant companion on the journey is uncertainty. As one figures out all that it means to become the newer version of themselves, they quickly discover how much they truly have no control over, or even knowledge of, at any particular time. Experiencing reinvention is to be uncertain much of the time. Certainty is the goal, but it is a luxury that may or may not ever surface. This has been my experience as I have been reinventing myself for a long period of time, and I can't say that I like uncertainty one bit. For someone like me, who has always prided myself on being proactive, organized, and planned, going through an extended time when I really could not see what was ahead of me (other than my ideal vision) has been very unsettling.

One of the authors who have been helpful to me in this process, and one I've quoted often, is Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, who stated, as quoted in the previous chapter:

The transition – sometimes abrupt and at other times protracted – is usually a time of fear, ambivalence, and chaos, during which it is hard to articulate where you are heading or how you will get there, and life feels out of balance and unfocused.

Another extremely helpful writer is Steve Donahue, who also described the uncertainty well.

You aren't really anywhere – it [the road] just stops. Life is like that, too. Sometimes the paved road you've been speeding along quite comfortably suddenly ends and you're in a desert, a place where our lives seem uncertain and unpredictable, and planning and experience have limited value.

Each of these describes the feeling I have had in the pit of my stomach. I was going along and doing well, then all of a sudden life took a chaotic turn, and I was no longer on the road I knew so well. I was forced into a time of reinvention that is still in progress, though I hope I am getting close to the finish line. We will see. It is a journey with an uncertain end. I have a good idea of when my journey began, but very little information as to when it will come to a close. I may not even fully know when it does. The good news is that I am certain of one thing: I am on the road, moving toward my reinvention, and regardless of how it plays out or how long it takes, I will be better off when it is finished. I am certain in my uncertainty.

Donahue spoke of the reward of moving through the deserts of change and uncertainty when he stated,

The desert of change can be an exhilarating adventure in aliveness if we know how to travel. If we allow our deserts to change us, to open us up, to teach us who we are and how to live in the moment, then nothing can match life and its deserts for excitement, fulfillment, and meaning.

This, again, is good news to keep in mind. If we continue to walk the road of reinvention, we will come out better. Life will be better and we will have a whole new purpose for being on the planet, but in order to do so, we must accept and even embrace uncertainty.

As said, I don't like it one bit. However, it's not really up to us to say if uncertainty is our companion or not. It is only up to us to choose to respond in a manner that will actually be of use. We can reject and fight against uncertainty. We can ignore it. We can claim that we are in control when the truth is, we are not. However, if we ever want to make it to the new version of ourselves, the sooner we accept the fact that things have changed and we don't know or control the future, the better. For me, learning how to deal with it has made me more trusting, patient, and thoughtful. I still make plans, but I'm less likely to be constricted by them when the need for flexibility arises. I've discovered that part of being the better me is the ability to adapt quickly, and stay nimble and agile. It is through the uncertainty that the things that really matter will often materialize.

Donahue speaks of "wandering on purpose," which is his way of saying that we must look to our inner compass in order to find a direction to guide us, a path to walk, and not merely a magic potion that solves our problems instantly. He stated what is my hope, "We might be rewarded with a [new] sense of direction if we can stand the discomfort of uncertainty."

Reinvention Lesson #8: Accept and embrace uncertainty.

10 Courage

Walt Disney has been quoted as saying, “Everyone needs a good failure along the way,” and T. D. Jakes states, “You need to fail boldly if you want to succeed extravagantly!” This is good advice, except that it is much easier said than done. No one wants to fail, so we typically stay in a continual state of risk aversion that helps us to carefully evaluate and mitigate situations in which we might lose it all. Fear of failure is a common human state, which is why when those who are heralded as being willing to take great risks in order to succeed come to light, we take such notice and applaud them.

All of us fall somewhere on the risk-aversion spectrum. A few, like world-class entrepreneur Richard Branson, embrace risk as a daily way of life, while most take only the most calculated risks and try to remain as safe as possible in their pursuits, even when their circumstances are unsure, mundane, or worse, painful. Many people fear risk and will remain in a painful situation because, as Steve Donahue explains, painful situations are at least predictable; however, in order to overcome our fear, we must embrace uncertainty and view life with a sense of adventure.

In our pursuit of reinvention, we must muster the courage to live life as a great adventure, walking away from painful, though predictable, circumstances and taking risks that will help us become our better self. Ralph Waldo Emerson is quoted as stating, “Don’t be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better.” Wow! What if we were able to have the courage to view life in this way? What if, instead of fearing the risk of failing, we were able to conduct one experiment after another, learning from each experience regardless of the outcome?

Psychologist and author Amy Morin offers practical advice on understanding fear and risk-taking when she wrote,

You should have some fear about stepping into traffic. That fear reminds you that you should look both ways before you cross the road, so you can reduce the risk that you’ll get hit by a car. If you didn’t have any fear, you’d likely behave recklessly. But our fear meters aren’t always reliable. They sometimes go off even when we’re not in any actual danger. And when we feel afraid, we tend to behave accordingly, falsely believing that if it feels scary, it must be too risky.

She makes a key point here. Sometimes things “feel scary” even when they don’t represent real danger. All too often we will avoid the risk simply because we feel fear. When this happens, we will stumble on the road to reinvention. Morin goes on to give

some practical advice for overcoming the fear of risk that will keep us from moving forward. She suggests we answer two questions:

- How bad would it be if the worst-case scenario that we fear did come true?
- How good would it be if the best-case scenario came true?

The pace of our progress to reinvention may be found in the answers to these questions. Often our “worst-case” scenario never happens, and even if it did, it may not be as bad as we imagine, while our “best-case” may be the exact thing which we’ve been searching for our entire lives. Even only getting partially to it may be far better than we can imagine. Which of these two questions we focus upon will greatly determine our progress. Focus only on #1 and we slow our progress, but focus mainly on the possibilities represented by question #2 and we will be less likely to be paralyzed by the fear of risk. Courage will spring up within us when we keep our eyes on what positive things will come from reinventing ourselves into our better self.

Reinvention Lesson #9: Have the courage to take risks.

11 Faith

This chapter's theme for reinvention is the importance of faith in God. The Bible speaks of how even faith the size of a mustard seed can be enough for God to do mighty things. That sounds easy, but for anyone who has gone through the challenge of reinvention, especially if it was initiated outside of our control, drumming up even the smallest amount of faith can be a struggle. Here are a few brief, practical measures we can do to find our mustard seed of faith so that we can go on.

1 – Get alone and listen.

Desert crosser Steve Donahue stated, “Alone in the desert, whether it’s a real Sahara or a desert of life, we’re more likely to hear the whispers of God, our soul’s yearning, or the guidance of our own wisdom.” The keys are to be alone, away from the noise of modern life, and to shut up and listen, because God’s voice comes in a whisper.

2 – Move on.

Earlier I spoke of the importance of knowing that as good as the past was, it’s over, and we must get on with preparing for the future. To do so, we must grab hold of our faith, small as it may be, and move forward. By doing so, we will begin to heal the hurts that may have accompanied our need for reinvention. It will take time, but as author Amy Morin stated, “Time doesn’t heal anything; it’s how we deal with that time that determines the speed at which we heal.” The point she is making is that we can either spend a long period languishing in our hurt and pain, or we can use that time to reinvent, change, and parlay our small faith into a big faith.

3 – Practice gratitude.

Morin also stated, “Instead of pitying ourselves for what we lost, we choose to feel grateful for what we had.” It’s amazing how much better we feel, react, and develop faith when we intentionally choose to be grateful for the blessings all around us. Reinvention is not always pleasant, nor is it free of challenges; however, if one is on the road to a better self, there will be evidence of God’s blessing to be grateful for, if we are willing to look for it. Merely the fact that the past is over and a brighter future lies ahead is reason enough to say “Thank you” and to put our faith in the One who promises to be looking out for our best interest.

Reinvention Lesson #10: A little bit of faith goes a long way.

12 Just Say No

“Just Say No” was Nancy Reagan’s battle cry for dealing with rampant drug abuse in the 1980s. Though simplistic in form and still unproven in actual effectiveness, it remains a sincere and worthwhile sentiment when trying to keep our youth from ever even considering trying drugs. I mention this because today’s lesson in reinvention calls for us to have the same cry and the same fervor when dealing with how our current culture often treats those who are thrust into a season of reinvention simply because they have a few extra candles on their birthday cake. Author Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot states, “In the twenty-first-century culture, there continues to be a preoccupation with all things youthful, and a prejudice – however veiled – against the symbols and signs of aging.” John Tarnoff describes himself as “feeling discouraged and wondering how my years of hard work had led to an apparent dead end” due to his own personal experience of being pushed out of a successful career. In corporate lingo this is referred to as age bias, and is technically illegal within discrimination laws. Unfortunately, as many who must now reinvent themselves have experienced, a bias against the older generation in the workforce is very real, illegal or not.

What is the answer? Lawsuits are expensive, and publically complaining about it only casts one into being seen as a bitter old guy, so it is important to take the legendary business leadership guru Dale Carnegie’s advice to heart, “When we hate our enemies, we are giving them power over us: power over our sleep, our appetites, our blood pressure, our health, and our happiness.” When someone tells us that we no longer have value because we got older, we must simply “Just say no.” Refuse to get old and don’t listen to the haters. I believe age only matters if we allow it to. Staying young is a matter of will, mind, and spirit. We must not allow anyone to define us because we are older. Instead, our self-definition must be based on who we choose to be, the work we choose to do, and the calling we believe God places on our lives. To emphasize this point, note that there is no example in all of the Bible where God tells people that they have aged out of serving and being useful and valuable. Nowhere will you find that people should stop contributing when they become older. Nowhere.

What about retirement? Shouldn’t we be willing to step aside and fade into the shadows? Again, scripture never suggests someone should retire, so those who embrace the call of remaining faithful and productive will agree with Lawrence-Lightfoot, who stated,

Retirement is not in their vocabulary; they do not want to retreat from their engagement in, or contribution to, society, even though they are eager to develop new kinds of activity, new daily rhythms, new habits of conduct, and new sources of motivation and reward.

In other words, instead of retirement, REINVENTION. However, it requires saying no to those who would try to call you too old and cast you away, and for you to take charge of your own future, with God's help, of course. For me, this means, as Steve Donahue states, "be myself rather than impersonate someone else." I choose to "just say no" to getting older, and even more so to those who would claim that I am. I choose to follow T. D. Jakes' advice, "Age and experience, when combined with action and enthusiasm, can make a powerful set of wings." You should, too.

Reinvention Lesson #11: Refuse to get old.

13 Legacy

I hope you have found this book to be helpful. For me, it has been therapeutic, because I have had the opportunity to think through and put into my own words the lessons I have learned while on my personal reinvention journey. Though I didn't expect to need to reinvent and I didn't begin the journey of my own choosing, I've found that it has become my lifeline to the next chapter of my ministry, career, and life in general. I had been perfectly content with my situation before I began this journey, and the need to reinvent took me totally by surprise, but nevertheless, I found myself thrust into reinvention because others viewed me as no longer relevant. To my last breath I will believe they were wrong; however, like it or not, I've taken the hard steps and made the sacrifices I needed to make in order to become a better me, reinvented and ready for the next adventure. I don't yet know the details, but I believe something great will still happen. Those who labeled me irrelevant because of their bias will be proven wrong.

The final lesson of reinvention has to do with the legacy we will leave. Eric Erikson stated, "I am what survives me." This simple statement has overwhelming truth attached to it. We will be remembered not by what we have done while on this earth, but by the things for which we are remembered long after we are gone. Even then, however, it has little to do with accomplishments, fame, or fortune. What will really matter to our legacy is people. Who have we touched and set on the right path? For whom have we cared and invested our values into? With whom have we shared the good news and changed their eternity? These are the things of legacy that come when we reinvent, because when we do, our view of who we are and why we are here often changes for the better. As we reinvent, our goals may change from self-focused to others-focused and we become more of a selfless and servant leader, modeled to us by Jesus, whose legacy we all understand.

One of my favorite pastors, and one whom I fully trust, turned me on to a book called *Hero Makers*, by J.D. Greear. This book speaks of legacy, though not necessarily using that exact word. It defines a hero maker as a "leader who shifts from being the hero to making others the hero in God's unfolding story." In other words, the hero reinvents themselves in such a way that they turn their attention outward and leave a legacy through their investment in others. These are heroes who will be survived by a whole new generation of heroes. When these reinvented heroes are gone, their legacy will carry on through the lives they have touched.

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot spoke of people who reinvent themselves as wishing to "give forward, to be useful, to make an imprint, and wanting their lives to have meant something." That's legacy. However, as T. D. Jakes reminds us, "uniqueness is seldom understood in real time," so we must be willing to invest in others long before we see any results. In fact, we may never see the results while we're on this planet. It may take

a heavenly view to see the legacy that we have left in generations of people who became heroes because we invested in them.

Reinvention is not easy. It takes a tremendous amount of emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical energy, usually long before we see any result or benefit, but it's worth it. It matters. It has long-term, even eternal, ramifications. Reinvention will turn us into a better version of ourselves and get us through the difficulties that pushed us along on journey's pathway, but more importantly, if we act on this final lesson of legacy, it will change lives, make this world a better place, and impact the kingdom of heaven. I can't think of a better reason.

Reinvention Lesson #12: Leave a legacy through the lives of others.

Conclusion

Well, there you go...12 lessons that I learned and that you can put into practice as you take the journey of reinvention. There are certainly more things that you can and will do along the way, but these are the big steps you will take. My prayer is that these will help you get started and encourage you to keep going as the road sometimes will get treacherous. Please know that I am a fellow journeyman on this path of reinvention. I don't have everything completed, nor have I gotten it all right on my first attempts, but I am on my way and I can see a bright, reinvented future ahead. I believe you can, too!

May the wind be always at your back and the Lord a step ahead.

Blessings!

Dr. John Plastow

Resources for Additional Reading

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He and Karen live in Northern Colorado, were married right after college, and have three millennial children!

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