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## reinventing yourself

**W**E LIKE TO THINK that the key to a successful career change is knowing what we want to do next and then using that knowledge to guide our actions. But change usually happens the other way around: Doing comes first, knowing second. Why? Because changing careers means redefining our *working identity*—how we see ourselves in our professional roles, what we convey about ourselves to others, and ultimately, how we live our working lives. Career transitions follow a first-act-and-then-think sequence because who we are and what we do are so tightly connected. The tight connection is the result of years of action; to change it, we must resort to the same methods.

Most of the time, our working identity changes so gradually and naturally that we don't even notice how much we have changed. But sometimes we hit a period when the desire for change imposes itself with great urgency. What do we do? We try to think out our dilemma. We try to swap our old, outdated roles for new, more alluring selves in one fell swoop. And we get stuck. Why? Because, as Richard Pascale observes in *Surfing the Edge of Chaos*,

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“Adults are much more likely to act their way into a new way of thinking than to think their way into a new way of acting.”<sup>1</sup> We re-think our selves in the same way: by gradually exposing ourselves to new worlds, relationships, and roles.

This book is a study of how people from all walks of professional life change careers. Looking close-up at what they really did—neither how they were supposed to do it nor how it appeared with hindsight—reveals two essential points that go against conventional wisdom. First, we are not one self but many selves. Consequently, we cannot simply trade in the old for a new working identity or upgrade to version 2.0; to reinvent ourselves, we must live through a period of transition in which we rethink and reconfigure a multitude of possibilities. Second, it is nearly impossible to think out how to reinvent ourselves, and, therefore, it is equally hard to execute in a planned and orderly way. A successful outcome hinges less on knowing one’s inner, true self at the start than on starting a multistep process of envisioning and testing *possible futures*. No amount of self-reflection can substitute for the direct experience we need to evaluate alternatives according to criteria that change as we do.

These two essential points are the foundation for a set of unconventional strategies that transform what appears to be a mysterious, road-to-Damascus transition process into a learning-by-doing practice that any of us can adopt. We start this process by taking action.

### Pierre: Psychiatrist Becomes Buddhist Monk

Pierre Gerard,<sup>2</sup> a thirty-eight-year-old best-selling French author and successful psychotherapist, remembers well the night he attended a dinner party in honor of a Tibetan lama. He and the lama, a European who ran a monastery in the French southwest, hit it off right away. Pierre had always been interested in Buddhism, and the lama was in turn interested in Pierre’s professional specialty, how

people mourn the loss of loved ones. The relationship that began that night would take Pierre in a completely unforeseen direction.

*I'm a psychiatrist by training. Early in my career, I did a hospital internship in an AIDS unit, in the time before AZT. That meant learning how to live with the dying and learning how to accept death. During an internship, your afternoons are free, and I used the time to volunteer at an AIDS hotline. My next post was in a palliative care center where I worked for a doctor who helped change the course of my career. She didn't believe in the traditional medical detachment. She encouraged me to "go be with them and learn" and to take the diploma course in palliative care that she created.*

*In palliative care, you see all the worst pathologies. I was supposed to be learning the purely psychiatric side: the psychoses, the deliria. But those didn't interest me at all. I was interested in how the human spirit experiences physical pathology. Around that time, I was asked to create a support group for people in mourning. It all started coming together: the AIDS unit, the hotline, the palliative care work, and the support group. That led to my first book, on mourning. It sold so well that I have spent much of the last five years leading conferences on this topic. I love that: writing and training, communicating technical knowledge in simple words.*

After medical school, Pierre set up a private practice. Classic psychotherapy never really interested him, and he much preferred working as part of a team, but private practice allowed him to make a good living after years as a poor medical student. He told himself that the psychotherapy practice was temporary and would be a good experience. "I felt a need to prove to myself that I could do it," he recalled, "and I believed I could help patients one-on-one." Private practice also gave Pierre the legitimacy to pursue further his passion—writing and speaking on how to help and survive the terminally ill—and afforded him an income that

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allowed him to devote time to volunteer in activities he found more meaningful. It all fit together.

When a doctor friend, also in palliative care, invited Pierre to the dinner he was hosting for the Tibetan lama, Pierre leapt at the chance. “I was thirteen, on vacation in Brittany and bored out of my mind, when I first picked up a book on Buddhism. It hasn’t left me since. In fact, it was Buddhism that led me to medicine. But I saw it as a personal life-philosophy, not a calling.”

“It sounds dumb when I tell it—I’m a very feet-on-the-ground person—but the second I met this man, there was an instant connection. Undeniably, there was something very strong there.” The lama invited Pierre to visit the monastery, which also had a palliative care group. A short visit led to a collaborative project, a one-week seminar designed as a “confrontation” between traditional psychology and a Buddhist approach to mourning. Eighty people attended this first of what became an annual event. Pierre hit upon the idea for a future book, a Buddhist perspective on bereavement.

*Connections started to form between me and the community: the monks, the laypeople, and the lama. There was no magic moment. Awareness came slowly. I can only describe what I felt as relief. I had already read all the books and had come to the end of what I could learn and practice on my own. So I went to the monastery more and more, at first every three months, then every month, then as often as possible.*

In the meantime, a proposal for a palliative care center that Pierre spearheaded failed to obtain funding.

*I killed myself on that project, putting it together financially, politically, and administratively. It didn’t go through for political reasons. It was a big disappointment. And yet, I could see clearly what I found frustrating about that kind of role. I would have been the director of this center. When it fell apart, I sensed that even if it had gone through, it was no longer what I wanted.*

*So I went to the monastery, this time just for me, to replenish*

*myself. I was exhausted physically and emotionally. One of the nuns offered me her house in the forest as a retreat. She said I could stay there as long as I liked. The thought of actually joining the community had never crossed my mind before. But one day I woke up in her little house in the woods and said to myself, "What if I were to do that?" I didn't want to be reactive, though. I was an expert on mourning, so I applied my own advice: I gave myself a year to mourn the failed project.*

A year passed and the "what if" question kept echoing.

*By this time I was convinced that my interest was not a reaction to any disaffection. I was in a long-term personal relationship that worked. I had a great reputation and was comfortable financially. But that wasn't enough. I projected myself into the future: more books, a bigger reputation, a nicer house. So what? None of that fulfilled my longing for spirituality.*

*Yet I resisted. Becoming a fully engaged Buddhist seemed crazy. Why give everything up? Why not just go there more often? At first, I only talked about it with the director of the center. He said it would be possible. Only months later did I consult a few other people. After that, I can't explain it. It is beyond the rational. It just slowly imposed itself as the obvious thing to do.*

But it wasn't until a Caribbean vacation a few months later that Pierre realized the time had come to make a choice. "We were on a beautiful island and I kept going inside to practice. My partner finally said to me, 'Don't tell me you're thinking of entering the monastery.' I realized then and there that I had already made my decision."

In an initial, preparatory three-and-a-half-year period, no vows of chastity or poverty are required, and "helping work" such as Pierre's writing and speaking is encouraged. But after that, continuing as a monk entails a closed, seven-year retreat. "It is at the same time a radical change and not a change at all," Pierre concludes.

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*Buddhism is very much “in your head,” like psychotherapy. It too, involves the analysis of human behavior and emotion. It’s a coherent step, bringing together all the pieces that matter to me: teaching, belonging to a community of service, holding myself to an intellectual rigor, and developing the spiritual dimension I had been seeking in everything I did. I thank myself each day for having made such a sound decision.*

### Lucy: Tech Manager Becomes Independent Coach

Lucy Hartman, a forty-six-year-old information technologist, had long thought she wanted a high-powered career as an executive, even better to be part of a high-tech start-up that awarded its executives lots of stock options. As with Pierre, a chance encounter, with a consultant hired to help her company, gave her a glimpse of a possible new future.

When she dropped out of college at twenty, Lucy had no idea what she wanted to do. She landed in technology “by accident” and had the good fortune to work for a manager who encouraged her to take programming courses.

*I just loved the problem solving and the precision that work required. I liked the sense of accomplishment I got from writing a program. Several years into it, though, I remember thinking to myself, “I hope I’m not doing this ten years from now.” The glow had worn off. But I had no idea what to do otherwise, and the technology area offered such great prospects that it felt daunting to even consider a career in which I would have to start all over again.*

*Times were booming, and I had a number of opportunities at some exciting companies. I put in core systems for Basys just before they took it public, and for Microdevices. Next, I had a brief stint at a commercial bank, which was a mistake for me because it was way too big and bureaucratic. By that time, I was starting*

*to feel frustrated with what I was doing. I went to a specialist in career renewal who gave me some assessment tests. She advised me to leverage what I was already doing into something new and different, so that I wouldn't have to start from scratch again. But nothing really came out of that. I just wasn't ready.*

*Then I went to Thomas Pink, a brokerage firm, where I had what I would describe as my career highs and lows. I implemented an extremely high-profile operating-system change that got me promoted to vice president. Technologically, I was the expert. But managerially, I was in way over my head. The people issues were beyond my understanding, let alone my having the skills to manage through them.*

*So we hired an organizational development consultant to advise us on how to build a solid management team and culture. I liked her so much that I hired her to coach me personally. The feedback she collected on me scared the living daylights out of me. I had imagined myself on a managerial career path, and I thought my people skills were among my core strengths. But she showed that they were not strong at all and that my coworkers perceived me as controlling. She worked with me for about seven or eight months, and the results were completely transformational. She engaged me with myself, arguing that I'd lost touch with who I was and what I wanted in my life. She thought I needed to figure that out rather than worry about how to climb the corporate ladder, which had been my obsession.*

*When I examined what I really wanted my life to be about, I concluded it was about connecting with people. Yet all my energy was going counter to that desire. I had this idea in my head that an executive at a company like Pink works seventy or more hours a week and doesn't really have time for anybody because there is all this stuff to do. I concluded that that was basically a crock, that I didn't have to work seventy hours a week to be successful. In fact, I started to realize that I might be happier and more successful if I invested more time in my colleagues at work and in my relationships outside work. My focus started to shift from tasks to relationships. My effectiveness improved as a result, but I also*

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*realized that I couldn't overcome some of the real barriers to change at Pink. I decided it was time for me to leave to pursue a career in a smaller company, where I could apply everything I had learned in the coaching. I went to work at ForumOne, a start-up, as a member of the executive team.*

*By this time, it was clear that I wanted to move on to something different. But I needed to build more confidence before taking a bigger chance on reinventing myself. So I decided to stay in the high-tech environment, which I knew well, but also to go back to school. I started a master's program in organizational development, thinking that at least it would make me a better leader and hoping it would be the impetus for a real makeover.*

*Three incidents marked a turning point. First, I attended a conference on organizational change that allowed me to hear the gurus and meet other people doing organizational development work. They had the tools to fix what I knew needed fixing in the high-tech world. I thought, "I want to do this. I don't know how I'm going to do it, but this is the community I want to be a part of."*

*Second, ForumOne was going through some acquisitions, and the restructuring meant my position was going to change. When I put my ego aside and looked at what I really wanted, I realized I did not want to run any of the new groups. What I really wanted to do was figure out how we were going to meld the two cultures in a sustainable way. But a number of our colleagues were stuck in a level of political jockeying that I didn't expect in such a small company, and much of my new job entailed "doing more with less." I wanted to spend all of my time helping people grow. When I was doing that, I loved it, but with so many other things competing for my time and energy, I was frustrated.*

*Third, one day my husband just asked me, "Are you happy? If you are, that's great," he said, "but you don't look happy. When I ask, 'How are you?' all you ever say is that you're tired. You leave the house every morning at 5:30 and you come home at 9 o'clock and you don't look happy." His question prompted me to reconsider what I was doing.*

*My original idea was to go work for a start-up. I figured that if I got lucky and the company went public, I'd have lots of money, and then I could afford to take a risk with a new career in which I might make very little for a few years. Then I started to ask, "What's really keeping me here?" When I looked at the gamble of staying for another year—when the stock might not be worth anything—it looked like I was gambling my happiness for more money. Still, I anguished about what to do for months, telling myself that it wasn't sane to quit a good job without knowing what you are going to do next.*

*The morning after my husband asked me that question, I had a sort of epiphany. I realized that I already had enough money to take a risk. What was holding me back was not financial security; it was plain fear that I might not be good at what I thought I'd be happy doing. I concluded that I might as well change now because I was dying to do something else and it would not get any easier with time. The next day—a year and a half ago—I quit.*

*I still didn't know exactly what form my new career would take. I said to myself, "I'll just finish my master's degree, try to get different types of work, and see what resonates." I started by calling everybody I knew. I went to different associations, contacted people who looked like they were doing similar things, and gradually started to build my practice.*

*My first client was ForumOne. The CEO asked me to help an executive in transition and to assess a new acquisition from an organizational perspective. That made it easier for me. It wasn't like I woke up on January 1 saying, "Oh my God, now what am I going to do?" I continued to work for them and found a couple of other clients. Believe it or not, my income the first year matched the previous year's salary. It wasn't all organizational development work at the start; some of the projects were straight management consulting. The mix gave me an opportunity to learn which new roles fit and which were too much like what I used to do.*

By the time Lucy finished her master's degree and got certified as a professional coach, her organizational development practice

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included some of the best high-tech companies in the United States. “I love what I am doing,” she concludes, “I am passionate about and fulfilled by my work in a way that I have never been before.”

### Different Paths, Common Plot

Pierre and Lucy each made a midcareer professional change. But, apart from that, their stories might not seem to have much in common.

Pierre’s change—psychiatrist becomes Buddhist monk—is enormous by any standard. Few of us seek a transition as dramatic. In fact, Pierre’s is by far the biggest “career change” described in this book. Lucy’s change, in comparison, seems slight. Yes, she quit her firm. Yes, she is now doing a different kind of work, trading technical expertise for people and organizational know-how. And yes, it most certainly felt like a leap into the unknown to her. But she remains in the Silicon Valley high-tech world following the oft-seen path of the manager who takes his or her Rolodex and becomes an independent consultant at midcareer.

From a different vantage point, Pierre’s change might seem less radical than Lucy’s: At least for a period of three and a half years, he continued doing what he always did (writing, lecturing, and helping other people with their problems). A big community was waiting for him, ready to help, cushioning the leap. Lucy, on the other hand, was going it alone. She might have had a good network of fellow coaches and potential clients, but in freelance work, “You eat what you kill.” Given her self-described attitudes about money and climbing the corporate ladder, not to mention the agony she suffered in deciding what to do, the kind of change she made might seem to take more courage.

Determining the magnitude of any work transition is highly subjective and hardly a relevant exercise. Who, apart from the person who has lived through it, can say whether the shift is big or small? For those of us who seek role models for changing careers, motives and trajectories are more pertinent points of comparison. In this regard, too, Pierre and Lucy are studies in contrast.

Pierre's story is about moving toward something that had grabbed him in his adolescence. Since the age of thirteen, his interest in Buddhism had grown deeper and stronger. He chose medicine as an expression of a calling that he continues to heed. But the scale and scope of what he would have to give up to pursue the calling as a monk posed a big dilemma for him. Though his case may seem extreme, variations on his quandary are common. Many of us feel a tug between well-paid, challenging, or stable jobs and the vocations we have practiced on the side, in some cases for the whole of our professional lives. Becoming a musician, a writer, an artist, a photographer, or a fashion designer at midcareer entails big personal sacrifices and typically dumbfounds the people around us, who fail to see why we don't simply keep our passions safely on the side.

Lucy, on the other hand, had been moving away for years from the technical career she fell into rather than chose. Knowing that something was missing but not being able to articulate what, she learned as much as she could from the exciting jobs and projects that came her way and hoped that each next step would clarify an end goal. At first, she wanted to climb the corporate ladder, moving from technology into management; next, she yearned to apply her new managerial skills in an entrepreneurial business; eventually, she realized she wanted to leave behind the relentless hours and the office politics. For those of us in Lucy's camp, who want change but lack a clear direction, the hardest part is finding an alternative to the path we are already on.

Like Lucy and Pierre, all of us approach the possibility of career change with different motivations, different degrees of clarity, different constraints, different stakes, and different resources. We move from different start points and end up at different destinations. But the differences stop here. In the middle, the vagaries of the transition process are strikingly similar.

Figuring out what to do with the next stage of one's professional life and how to begin it is a learning process with identifiable characteristics. Even when we don't have the answer or know where we are going, there is a knowable process that will lead us to the answer. As we will see throughout this book, even the most

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disparate career changes share a transition process, which figure 1-1 illustrates.

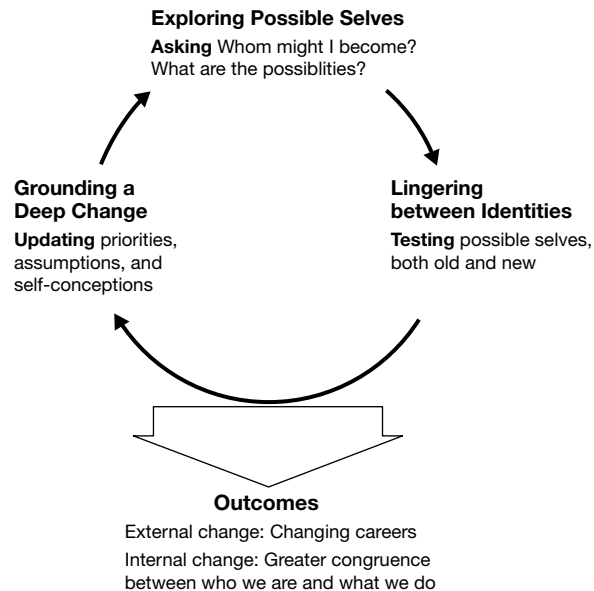
## Identities in Transition

We like to think that we can leap directly from a desire for change to a single decision that will complete our *reinvention*. As a result, we remain naive about the long, essential testing period when our actions transform (or fail to transform) fuzzy, undefined possibilities into concrete choices we can evaluate. This transition phase is indispensable because we do not give up a career path in which we have invested so much of ourselves unless we have a good sense of the alternatives.

FIGURE 1 - 1

### Identities in Transition

#### HOW THE REINVENTING PROCESS UNFOLDS



Neither Lucy nor Pierre planned their way into their transitions, nor did they kick things off with a good dose of self-analysis. Instead, events in their lives and work led them to envision a new range of *possible selves*, the various images—both good and bad—of whom we might become that we all carry.<sup>3</sup> Some experiences presented new prospects, revealing alluring possibilities neither Pierre nor Lucy had considered before. Others helped them recognize outdated identities—roles that no longer really fit (e.g., a top manager), selves they thought they should become but were beginning to doubt (e.g., a center administrator). Still other occurrences raised the specter of their “feared selves,” their worst-case scenarios of whom they might become if they chose to stay on the same old track (e.g., a harried, busy-round-the-clock executive). Change always takes much longer than we expect because to make room for the new, we have to get rid of some of the old selves we are still dragging around and, unconsciously, still invested in becoming.

Consider Pierre. Before the dinner party, Buddhist practice and values certainly formed part of his working identity; they had steered him to a medical career and helping work and guided many of his choices about how he invested his time. But “Buddhist monk” had never been a fantasized possible future, and even that night, he would never have dreamed of his impending career change.

So, how did his transition unfold? One step at a time. With each visit to the monastery, Pierre saw how monks lived, how they dressed, what they ate, what they did. Whatever vague (and possibly incorrect) image he held about Buddhist monks (e.g., they are always Asian) was gradually sharpened. By running workshops and by expanding his own Buddhist practice, he saw what it meant to be part of such a community. He was able to tangibly assess how much he liked it, where and how he fit in, what he brought to the table, how his competencies might be valued, and how his expertise might, in turn, be enriched by the Buddhist perspective. Pierre started to develop a working identity—still unformed, still untested—defined by his new activities and relationships at the monastery. In parallel, he continued his regular professional activities, including developing the palliative care center he was to direct.

14 The logo for 'workingidentity' features the word 'working' in a lowercase, sans-serif font, followed by 'identity' in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. Above the 'i' in 'identity' are three small, light gray circles of varying sizes, arranged in a slight arc.

Likewise, Lucy's encounter with the coach she grew to emulate led her to new activities and relationships in organizational development; these, in turn, shaped and changed her sense of the possibilities. At first, she imagined she was improving her management style and, therefore, working on her future identity as a senior executive. She left Pink to go to ForumOne in the hope of finding a fresh context for trying out some of the things she had learned from her coach. But the more she learned about organizational development, the more she was drawn to the idea of a people-focused, rather than a technology-focused, career. She enrolled in a master's program, going to school part-time and grabbing every chance she had to attend organizational development conferences or meet people in this new field.

Both Pierre and Lucy spent a good deal of time lingering *between identities*, oscillating between their old, outdated roles and the still distant possible selves they could make out on the horizon. After a while, however, both felt the strain of trying to live in two different worlds. Pierre lost more and more tolerance for the political nature of the medical establishment in which he operated as a psychiatrist. He came to resent time away from the monastery. And he started to feel torn between the helping work he loved and the hours he put in to pay the bills. Likewise, Lucy began to feel a tug between her old role as a top executive and an embryonic possible self that would allow her to focus all her energies on the people side of the business.

While new possible selves are still nascent, it is easy to fit them in on the side; but as they develop more fully, they crowd some of our older roles, provoking invidious comparisons. Outdated though they may be, our past working identities are not dislodged so easily. Their persistence confronts us with taken-for-granted priorities and assumptions about how the world works. These need to be reexamined before we can go any further. That's when the going gets rough. Once the change is under way but long before the transition is completed, different versions of our selves battle it out in a long and anguished middle period.<sup>4</sup>

For Lucy, her husband's question helped break the impasse. She realized that to shed her image of herself as a future, high-level executive with a brilliant corporate career, she also had to dismantle its underpinnings: her attitudes about money and risk, her self-perception as a "rational person" (one who doesn't leave a good job without the next one lined up), and her acceptance of long hours as par for the course. Progress from that moment forward required a deeper change than she originally anticipated; in the end, she had to reconsider not only the kind of work she wanted to do but also the kind of person she wanted to be and the sacrifices she was prepared to make to grow into that new self.

Pierre had long persuaded himself that he had an excellent portfolio of professional activities. He recognized that some were more rewarding than others, but he reasoned that his less fulfilling roles were enriching but not necessary. He had grown accustomed to segmenting his various selves—the team player who thrived on collegial interaction, the spiritual self who sought meaning in work, the intellectual interested in the psychological and philosophical foundations of human suffering, the educator who loved disseminating knowledge via his books and courses. On vacation, he realized he no longer wanted to compartmentalize. For Pierre, *deep change* meant establishing a greater coherence between what he did and who he was becoming.

Reinvention ripples through many layers of our lives. An outwardly radical change (psychiatrist to monk) can reflect a deeper continuity while what looks like an incremental move (executive to executive coach) can mask a profound change. What is important is not changing the work or organizational context but reworking outdated basic premises and decision rules that are still governing our professional lives. Pierre's professional goals have changed in favor of fulfillment rather than reputation. Lucy's work is no longer the central organizing principle in her life; her personal life is more balanced and money has become a secondary concern. Reinvention, as defined in this book, involves such shifts.

## Identities in Practice

A view of human beings as defined by our “internal states”—our talents, goals, and preferences—is deeply ingrained in the Western world. This view is at the root of conventional approaches for making career decisions: If our “true identity” is inside, deep within ourselves, only introspection can lead to the right action steps and a better-fitting career.

Neither Lucy’s nor Pierre’s experience conforms to this model, nor do the other reinvention stories we examine here. Instead, like most people, Pierre and Lucy learned about themselves experientially, by doing rather than thinking. Certainly, reflecting on past experiences, future dreams, and current values or strengths is an essential and valuable step. But reflection best comes later, when we have some momentum and when there is something new to reflect on. Our old identities, even when they are out of whack with our core values and fundamental preferences, remain entrenched because they are anchored in our daily activities, strong relationships, and life stories. In the same way, identities change in practice, as we start doing new things (*crafting experiments*), interacting with different people (*shifting connections*), and reinterpreting our life stories through the lens of the emerging possibilities (*making sense*).

Long before they took the leap, Pierre and Lucy tried out their new roles on a limited, experimental scale. They made increasing investments of their time and energy rather than one momentous decision. Neither at the start imagined the magnitude of the changes ahead. Pierre’s experiments consisted of spending time at the monastery, giving seminars, and developing his own spiritual practice. He began a book linking his interests in bereavement and Buddhism. Lucy hired a personal coach, attended seminars, and later went back to school for a master’s while continuing her job as a manager. Even after leaving ForumOne, she experimented with consulting jobs to eliminate those too much like her old line of work.

Pierre and Lucy also shared the good fortune of having a guiding figure to help them over the chasm, and both enjoyed the

encouragement of a new professional community. But these were not career counselors, outplacers, or headhunters, nor were they family and close friends. Instead, they found support in new acquaintances and peer groups. For Pierre, meeting a Tibetan lama who was, like he, a European, turned an abstract notion to a concrete reality embodied in a mentor figure. As he spent more and more of his time at the monastery, he found an intellectual and spiritual community he wanted to be part of. Lucy also found a role model in the organizational consultant whom she engaged at Pink. The consultant helped her see she was on the wrong track and pointed her to the community of organizational development professionals she immediately recognized she wanted to be part of.

All good stories hinge on turning points, dramatic moments when the clouds part and the truth is revealed. In this regard, too, Pierre and Lucy are typical. Both experienced events that triggered a realization that they were fed up with the old and ready to embrace something new. A project that Pierre had slaved on died a political death. Lucy's company was restructured and the political infighting heightened. Suddenly, both saw themselves in a future they no longer wanted.

Few working lives are untouched by organizational changes, internal management shuffles, office politics, and the stress, burnout, or disaffection that goes with the territory. But, these external triggers are rarely enough to propel a deeper change. The barrier, for both Pierre and Lucy, was a lingering hope that both old and new selves could happily coexist. On vacation, forced to make sense of the "non"sense of his actions, Pierre finally realized he had to choose. Lucy's husband's question, "Are you happy?" tipped her off to her rising malaise with her managerial role and the toll it was taking. For both, a small, symbolic moment, rather than an operatic event, jelled awareness that the time was ripe for change. Significantly, this personal turning point came late in the transition process, when both Pierre and Lucy were well along the way.

Pierre's and Lucy's stories are far from unique. Once we start questioning not only whether we are in the right job or organization but also what we thought we wanted in the future, the planned

and methodical job search methods we have all been taught fail us. As summarized in figure 1-2, during times of identity in transition—when our possible selves are shifting wildly—the only way to create change is to put our possible identities into practice, working and crafting them until they are sufficiently grounded in experience to guide more decisive steps.

## Overview of the Book

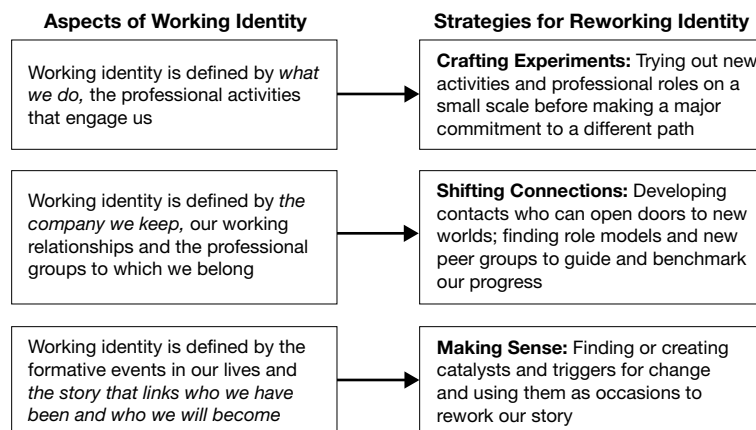
This book is about how people like Pierre and Lucy make their way to the next phases of their professional lives. It is divided into two parts that will flesh out the frameworks outlined in figures 1-1 and 1-2.

Part 1, Identity in Transition, describes the process of questioning and testing our working identities, eventually making more profound changes than we initially imagined. Chapter 2, Possible Selves, explains that although most of us would prefer to begin

FIGURE 1 - 2

### Identities in Practice

#### ACTIONS THAT PROMOTE SUCCESSFUL CHANGE



with a firm answer to the question, “Who do I really want to become?” the best way to start is by asking smaller, more testable questions, such as, “Which among my various possible selves should I start to explore now? How can I do that?” Chapter 3, *Between Identities*, describes the long, chaotic period of transition that begins when we start testing; during this time, identity remains undefined because we are not yet ready to give up our old roles, and alternative possibilities are still elusive. We are truly in-between. Chapter 4, *Deep Change*, shows how necessary this unpleasant time is, as our sense of identity shatters before it reconfigures.

Part 2, *Identity in Practice*, describes what actions throughout the transition period increase the likelihood of making a successful change. Chapter 5, *Crafting Experiments*, describes how we probe the future by transforming abstract possibilities into tangible projects we can evaluate. Chapter 6, *Shifting Connections*, shows how finding new mentors, role models, and professional groups eases our membership in new communities. And chapter 7, *Making Sense*, maps out how we rewrite the story of our lives.

The book concludes with chapter 8, *Becoming Yourself*, in which the unconventional strategies outlined in this book are summarized. It suggests ways to kick off the lifelong process of questioning and affirming the relationship between who we are and what we do. Making important career moves, and ultimately, life changes, requires us to live through long periods of uncertainty and doubt. We can learn much from the experiences of others to make these difficult passages easier to navigate.

