

STOP PLAYING SAFE



Rethink Risk.

Unlock the Power of Courage.
Achieve Outstanding Success.

MARGIE WARRELL

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Introduction

Imagine yourself 20 years from now, looking back on the intervening time. What would you love to have accomplished in your career and life? What impact would you like to have made? What kind of person would you like to have become by making it?

Twenty years from now there will be people no smarter or more capable than you who will have accomplished extraordinary things across all spheres of life. While it's impossible to know who they will be, what is certain is that they will all have made courageous choices, taken bold actions and refused to succumb to the fear that drives so many to think small and play safe.

Life is the lump sum of our choices. Too often though, our choices are driven by fear, self-doubt and insecurity rather than a clear sense of purpose, confidence and courage. Fear drives us to avoid risk, play safe and settle for the status quo, however unrewarding or miserable it is.

Sombre economic forecasts, corporate cutbacks, natural disasters, fundamentalist extremism, international conflict—look at what's making news today and chances are at least one headline is fuelling fear and feeding insecurity. While this may not have you racing to stock up your pantry on canned tomatoes and bottled water, there's no escaping that we live in a culture that breeds fear and drives us to play safe, avoid change and settle for less than we want.

Research shows that our brains are wired to overestimate risk, exaggerate its consequences and underestimate our ability to handle it. Confronted with ongoing economic instability and mounting global competition, fear in the workplace has grown

so pervasive that playing safe and avoiding risk has become the norm. Yet history has shown that when fear runs most rampant, courageous action reaps the greatest rewards. And nowhere is courage more needed right now than in the work we do, and the way we do it.

I wrote my first book, *Find Your Courage*, to help people overcome the doubts and fears that were undermining their relationships and wellbeing, and confining them to their lives of quiet desperation, immaculate mediocrity or both. Meanwhile, the world has suffered its worst economic collapse since the Great Depression, and the fear that stifled people's personal lives has infiltrated into the corners of organisations globally. We live in a complex, competitive and fast-changing world. The actions that got you to where you are today will not be sufficient to take you to where you want to be 10 years from now. As the world has changed, so you too must change how you engage in it.

I have written this book because I have a passionate belief in the potential of human beings to create lives rich in meaning and contribution. In my work within organisations around the world, I constantly encounter people trapped inside prisons of their own making, failing to utilise their potential—people whose experience of going to work every day is marred with anxiety, resentment and resignation. Perhaps you relate.

What you do matters. How you do it matters even more. Sadly, global surveys on employee engagement tell us that many people don't believe so. The cost to the bottom line runs into the billions. The cost to the human spirit is immeasurable. Underlying this disengagement is the fundamental fear of failing, of looking foolish, of not having enough and not being enough.

The fact is you have all the resources available to you for creating a life *and* a career that fulfil you so that your work not only enables you to make a good living, but also to enjoy a more rewarding everyday experience of life (rather than just weekends and holidays). Research has confirmed what my experience has shown me: when people connect to a deeper purpose in their work they're not only more engaged and effective in their work, but also more inclined to take the risks essential for success.

There are countless business books filled with strategies for becoming a more proficient networker, strategist, salesperson, negotiator, 'hi-po' employee, manager and leader. There are very few that get to the heart of what holds people back from applying

them. The reality is that it's not a lack of knowledge that prevents most people from doing more and being more—it's a lack of clarity about what they truly want, and the courage to go and get it.

While this book is written for the individual, the principles, concepts and strategies it contains can benefit any team, group or organisation. After all, while organisations are living entities in their own right, they comprise individuals. An organisation cannot become more competitive, focused or innovative unless the people who work in it are. Indeed, the greatest competitive advantage available to any organisation is its people. But it's not just their experience, expertise or skills that can give the competitive edge. It's their commitment to the organisation's mission, how openly and effectively they communicate with each other, customers and suppliers, and most of all, their willingness to 'push the envelope' of possibility. All of this entails a degree of risk and demands a measure of courage. If everyone in your organisation practised the principles in this book, it would propel your organisation forward in every way—from customer service to product innovation, from sales to project execution—building bottom-line outcomes as never before.

This book comprises eight chapters, the first seven of which form *The Courage Key* model, which you can view in the appendix. The chapters of *Part I: Core Courage*, form the core foundation of *The Courage Key*. *Part II: Working Courage* provides you with concepts and practical strategies to be both more courageous and effective in handling the many challenges and seizing the opportunities in your work and life. The theme of each chapter in Part II—Confront, Adapt, Leverage and Lead—create the CALL acronym and are your 'call to action' to stop playing safe. *Part III: Take Courage* is where the rubber hits the road as you step out of your comfort zone and into action in making the changes and taking the chances needed to experience the success and fulfilment that prompted you to pick up this book in the first place. Part III is focused on helping you set yourself up for success over the longer term, creating an environment that supports you in *getting* and *staying* in purposeful and courageous action, no matter what.

Interspersed through all eight chapters are case studies of numerous people—from CEOs of global organisations to trail blazing entrepreneurs—whom I've interviewed while writing

this book for their insights and experiences of acting with courage. Finally, I have also included Courage Keys and Courage Challenges to help you apply the concepts I discuss to the challenges and opportunities you face today. I encourage you to invest the time to do the challenges as you go along. Together, the following eight chapters will help you to rethink risk and unlock the power of courage in your life so that you can soar above the fears and beliefs that have kept you from achieving the level of success you want.

While I hope this book will equip you with practical tools for engaging in courageous conversations and taking brave actions that will elevate the trajectory of your career, my greater hope is that it will elevate the trajectory of your life. By unlocking the power of courage in your life, you'll tap into the unbridled potential within you and enjoy the genuine satisfaction that flows from working hard at work worth doing.

I hope you'll return to this book again and again as you navigate your way through the maze of choices, changes and challenges that are certain to unfold before you in the years ahead. May it become a trusted guide for unlocking your courage in a fearful and fast-changing world and for finding the clarity to make smart decision, not just safe ones. I hope also that you'll be able to seize opportunity in your adversity so you can add the full quota of your contribution and enjoy the full quota of rewards and satisfaction you'll earn by doing so.

Icons explained



Courage Key

When you see this box throughout the book, it will highlight a strategy or idea you can use in your daily life to be more effective in what you do, improving your ability to communicate with more confidence, to add more value and to become more valued by others. Each Courage Key will help you to unlock courage, clarity and confidence.



Courage Challenge

Growing self-awareness is crucial to your success in every arena of life. When you see this box throughout the book regard it as an invitation to build your awareness of where your actions may be getting in the way of your success. If you don't have time to do each Courage Challenge right away, make a point to come back to it later as each of these challenges is designed to help you elevate your thinking and respond more constructively and courageously to the people, problems and opportunities in your work and life.

Chapter 5

Learn, unlearn and relearn

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.

Charles Darwin

In 1993 about 1600 people belonged to the International Flat Earth Research Society of America. I kid you not.

Their president, Charles K. Johnson, stated publicly that he had been a proud 'Flat Earther' all his life: 'When I saw the globe in grade school I didn't accept it then and I don't accept it now'.

Needless to say, there are people you might call 'late adapters'!

Of course, when it comes to adapting to changes in the world around us, whether they be changes in the prevailing beliefs or changes in the actual environment in which we live, learning how to adapt to change can be difficult. For some, such as Charles K. Johnson, who died in 2001 still adamant that the moon landings had been staged, it can be more difficult than others.

While it's easy to mock someone who maintains the world is flat hundreds of years after it's been proven otherwise, there are many respected people who have made similar statements that, with hindsight, now seem equally short-sighted. For example, this comment made by Darryl F. Zanuck, head of 20th Century Fox, in 1946: 'Television won't be able to hold onto any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night.'

Change before you have to

To succeed in today's world, it's vital for you to remain open-minded about what's changing around you and how those changes, including the almost imperceptible ones, will reshape the world we live in five or 25 years from now. Don't walk into the future blindfolded. The more attention you pay to what's changing around you today, the better you'll adapt to the challenges of tomorrow, find opportunities within them and capitalise on them.

My kids can't comprehend how I ever organised a social life back in the ancient pre-Facebook era. Their digital brains boggle even further trying to imagine how anyone ever did their job without computers, email or mobile phones.

'We used to send smoke signals,' I chide them.

In their world, as they sit on the couch with their iPads skyping their friends on the far side of the globe, that may as well have been how we communicated. What they don't realise is that by the time they become parents, their children will think the technology they use today is as antiquated as the pagers so many relied on to do their job just 20 years ago.

Adult education experts estimate that up to 40 per cent of what tertiary students are learning will be obsolete a decade from now when they will be working in jobs that have yet to be created. Indeed, the top 10 most in-demand jobs today didn't even exist 10 years ago. To say that we live in a changing world understates its pace and its vast scope.

Of course it's not just technology that's changing the world. Profound changes in demography and longevity have experts predicting that by 2020 there will be more people aged over 65 than under 15 in the world's developed countries. Add to this the social changes in family structure, the globalisation of talent and continued innovation in technology, and it's hard to imagine just what the world and its increasingly mobile workforce will look like 20 years from now. You can't do either by playing safe and avoiding change. As *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman wrote, 'Standing still is deadly'.

Yes, the world is changing fast, and there is no sign of it slowing anytime soon. For the three-plus billion people in the workforce

it's not just about keeping up with the rate of change and the nature of the work we do, but how we do it and where.

When anyone can work from anywhere, it changes the nature of work everywhere. Traditional boundaries disappearing and the global talent pool becoming more skilled and mobile presents challenges for people in developed countries to adapt faster in order to simply stay competitive. There's no two ways about it: your ability to adapt to change and proactively make changes in your career is what will make a crucial difference to where you find yourself even just five years from now.

Catalysts for career change

There are many reasons why people choose to change their jobs and careers. Being able to predict the changes you'll make one or five years from now can help you prepare for them. Look at these key reasons for considering a job or career change and think about how relevant they are to you, or how they may become more relevant in the future.

- *Life changes.* Your life has changed and the career you started out on isn't compatible with your life today. This is something I've seen happen to people whose jobs require a lot of travel, or who are on call 24/7 or working family-unfriendly shifts. They usually end up in careers that offer greater flexibility, enabling them to honour the commitments and values in other areas of their life outside the workplace.
- *Maturing preferences.* We're often expected to make career choices in our late teens and early 20s, even though it's often not until we reach our 30s that our preferences really solidify. By then many people feel so invested in a particular career path that changing it seems too costly. But it's important to be honest with yourself about the cost of not changing too, and why. While you once loved going to work and enjoyed the challenges and responsibilities of your job, you no longer do. Perhaps your work no longer challenges you as it once did, taking the reward out of it. Or perhaps it simply doesn't interest or energise you any more. As we age and evolve so too do our preferences.

- *Money.* It's no surprise that money is usually not the reason why people change careers. However, sometimes low-paying work can be the catalyst for people to make a career change, particularly as they have children and financial pressures mount. If you chose a career that's traditionally low paying to begin with, it's likely because you felt it would be rewarding. So be careful when making a decision to change career for money alone. Working in a high paying job that isn't fulfilling is not a recipe for success at work or in life. Hopefully the career you change to will be one that leverages your unique talents and expertise and is meaningful to you beyond improving your bank balance.
- *Stress.* Some jobs are naturally more stressful than others. While the pressure of some roles can be exciting and adrenaline-pumping in the beginning, after a time the stress can take a toll and people can suffer an adrenaline burnout. To preserve mental and physical health it can be worth looking for a less stressful job or career.
- *Market/industry changes.* The outlook in your field was optimistic when you started out, but due to changes in technology, the economy or the industry, job and advancement opportunities are shrinking. You want to work in a field or industry that provides greater opportunities for growth, development and experience in a variety of interesting yet challenging roles.

Whatever reasons drive your decision to make a change, it doesn't change the fact that change—even change for the better—can be difficult. While my first 18 years of life involved relatively little change, ever since then it's been constant. Some of it I've eagerly pursued, albeit with moments of nervous apprehension. Some of it I've tripped through, awkwardly yet openly. And some of it I've really struggled with, often overwhelmed and sometimes resentful. All of it I've grown from. Whether spending a year backpacking around the world with no more than a few nights in the same bed, having four children in five years across three countries in seven homes, or starting down a new and unknown career path in the middle of all those moves and babies, change is something I've become intimately

acquainted with. Needless to say, when it comes to adapting—to learning, unlearning and relearning—I’ve learned plenty by trial and error. As my husband and I support each other in pursuing our respective callings, and our children venture out into the world to explore and pursue theirs, I’m confident plenty more learning awaits.

*You cannot become who you aspire to be by
staying who you are.*

We all want certainty and predictability, because our brains look for patterns. However, because life is the way it is, it can never stay the way it is. Whether in the form of a change of plans or a change of heart, change can be very unsettling and uncomfortable. Just because you’ve chosen to leave a job, relocate for a new job, taken on a bigger role or transitioned into an entirely new career, doesn’t mean it will, by default, be easy. If change were easy, everyone would be doing it.

But here’s the deal: you can’t become who you want to become by staying who you are. Which is what this chapter is about: helping you become more comfortable with the inherent discomfort of change so you can find hidden opportunities in the changes that are out of your control, and be more proactive in initiating the changes that you can control.

The more adept you are at initiating, navigating and managing change, the more successful you’ll be in your job today and in the future. As social psychologist Daniel Spurk found in his research on adaptability in the workplace, employees who are more adaptable are far more likely to leapfrog over those who aren’t. The cost of rigidity and resistance grows steeper by the day. Sociologist Benjamin Barber wrote, ‘I don’t divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and the failures...I divide the world into the learners and non-learners’.

Why we resist change

How often have you heard people make reference to ‘the good old days?’ It’s generally not because life was any better 10 or 30 years ago than it is now but it reflects the affection most of us have for

the past, and our innate aversion to what's new, untested, unfamiliar and unpredictable. When casting your mind back to days gone by, your selective recall filters out the anxiety and stress you felt in 'the good old days' and focuses instead on the happier memories, the irony being that you will one day look back on today as 'the good old days'. Why wait?

As difficult as change can sometimes be, we don't always fear it. Most people I know enjoy variety. Many actively seek it. Even the most timid, change-averse people enjoy some semblance of it. We wear different clothes every day. Even men who wear dark suits and white shirts to work each day still change their tie just to mix things up a bit. I've been known to rearrange the furniture in my living room for no other reason than I grew tired of its configuration. After all, 'change is as good as holiday', and often far cheaper. Likewise, there are many people who never go to the same holiday destination twice because they want to explore new places and experience different cultures and climates: mountains one year; beaches the next.

*Bold action in the face of uncertainty is not only terrifying,
but necessary in the pursuit of great work.*

Jonathan Fields

The reason why so many people enjoy variety in their personal lives yet struggle with change in the workplace largely boils down to control. We like to feel that we have some control over our circumstances and yet in our jobs we often feel anything but. It's our lack of control over the variables, and our uncertainty about what lies ahead, that can overwhelm us and trigger fear and anxiety. We like to make plans based on a future we can predict. When the terrain grows unfamiliar, undermining our ability to plan and predict, it gives rise to stress, chips away at our confidence and fuels our fear. Intellectualising why any change is good is not sufficient to arrest our fear. Emotions will trump logic every time. Unless you confront them, they will continue to fuel any residual resistance and rigidity. So as you read through the four main fears—fear of the unknown, failure, success and loss—consider which ones are at play as you look towards making the changes needed to create the career you truly want, and get off the default path that's taking you somewhere you don't want to be.

Fear of the unknown

‘Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t.’ It’s a common adage I’ve heard people say when considering changing something about their lives they’re unhappy with, the logic being that it is better to stick with the status quo—however miserable it happens to be—than to risk it for something that may be worse. The unknown makes us feel vulnerable because, quite simply, we don’t know what it holds. We’re not sure what threats it may have in store nor how it will shake up our safe, secure and familiar world. It’s why people hold firm to beliefs long after they’ve been proven wrong. It’s why people stay in marriages long after they’ve grown devoid of any joy or intimacy. It’s why people stay in jobs they hate:

- *What if* my job is outsourced?
- *What if* I’m not employable elsewhere?
- *What if* my company restructures and there isn’t a role for me in the new organisation?
- *What if* the market keeps shrinking and we lose market share?
What then?

‘What if?’ indeed! This question quickly follows any time we contemplate making a change—from our hairstyle to our address. But when it comes to changing careers, our fear of the ‘What if?’ increases exponentially. It’s what stops so many people from moving from a job they find miserable and starting over in a new field, no matter how right it may be. Fear can be paralysing. Learning how to sit with ambiguity and accept the discomfort of uncertainty takes practice. What’s important when you’re looking at making a job or career change is to acknowledge your fears as valid and normal, but not to let them run the show.

In reality, when it comes to making a big change you should expect a file drawer bulging with fears listed under most categories. Sometimes we’re afraid of making career changes even when we know it’s time for a change. It should be exciting to do something you’ve always wanted to do or you’re passionate about but even if the changes we seek are ones we want, we still feel anxious because, in the end, change holds uncertainty and involves loss in some way.

Fear of failure

Fear of failure (and losing face) is one of the most fundamental fears we face in life. It keeps us in our comfort zone, where it's a pretty sure bet we won't mess up or fall short. Adapting to change requires being willing to let go of your hold on guaranteed success and trying something you may never have done before. It means stepping out of your comfort zone and into the possibility that you may not have what it takes, that you may make a mistake, or worse, that you may fall flat on your face in front of the people you most want to impress. As Seth Godin wrote in his book *Tribes*, often fear of failure isn't actually a fear of failure at all, but rather a fear of criticism or looking foolish and losing face in front of those whose approval and admiration we value. That is, we're more afraid of being judged for our failure than of the failure itself.

Allowing what other people may think, or say—or what you *think* they may think or say—to run your life is a powerless way to live. In other words, letting your fear of criticism keep you from proactively making changes that you believe would be in your best interest is essentially handing over the reins for running your life to other people.

Fear of success

The concept of being afraid of success will seem like an anathema to some people, and odd to most. I recall the first time I read about 'fear of success': I thought it was a typo. I mean, who could be afraid of succeeding? However, over the years I've realised that fear of success isn't really that we're afraid of success, but that we're afraid of how that success will impact our life.

We have assumptions (often wrong) about what successful people are like. We fear that we may become like them: materialistic, workaholic, egotistical, shallow and lonely. We fear our ability to maintain the routines we enjoy. We fear the pressures and expectations of success. That people will want something different, or more from us than what we're able to deliver. That we won't be able to live up to their expectations. That we'll be uncovered as

a fraud. We fear that we'll feel stressed all the time with the extra demands and responsibilities we'll have to manage, and that we may crumble under their weight. So, in a sense, fear of success is really fear of failure in disguise. Just as it's much more painful to fall from the roof off your house than to trip from your front doorstep, so too we fear that a fall from the lofty heights of success will be socially humiliating and professionally embarrassing.

Fear of loss

As noted in chapter 2, research has proven that human beings are biologically wired to overestimate potential loss and potential gain, and underestimate their ability to handle the consequences if things don't work out. That is, for most people the fear of losing \$100 is more intense than the hope of gaining \$150. The observation that losses loom larger than gains tends to run true: we're naturally averse to loss, and all change involves loss in some way.

In reality, we can't adapt to new situations without being willing to give up something of our current way of doing and being. Sometimes change means we lose colleagues, our salary or even our parking space. Sometimes change means losing our sense of place in a team, group or organisation. Less evident but equally devastating can be the loss of known routines or the things that define who we are (such as a job title or a position). But instead of asking yourself, 'What will I lose?', ask 'What can I gain?' Where we put our focus is the major difference between those who change well and those who don't. Those who embrace change discover opportunities within it that those who are busy resisting it and whining about it miss out on.

Most people who have made a significant change in their career say their only regret is that they didn't make it sooner. Many have shared with me that they held off making a change until they were either so miserable, or their job had become so untenable, that they could no longer bear it. Or they felt they had to have all their ducks in a row before taking the plunge. Or both.



What fears fuel your resistance to change?

Write down any fears you think of as you answer the questions below. Consider how they may have limited your success and fulfilment up to now and how, by overcoming them, you can make changes to enjoy greater success and fulfilment in the future.

- *Fear of the unknown.* What is it I'm afraid might happen in the future?
- *Fear of failure.* What is it I'm afraid I won't be able to do or learn or become successfully? What mistakes am I scared I'll make? What am I afraid others might think if I do make those mistakes?
- *Fear of success.* If I change, what other demands will be made of me? What is it that I'm afraid will change if I achieve what I want? What extra pressures or stressors do I fear will accompany success?
- *Fear of loss.* What am I afraid of losing? Am I assessing the potential losses disproportionately from the potential gains?

Ask yourself, if I didn't have any of the fears that I just listed, what would I do differently? What actions would I stop taking? What actions would I start? Who would I speak to? What new skills would I endeavour to learn?

Getting ahead in an accelerating world

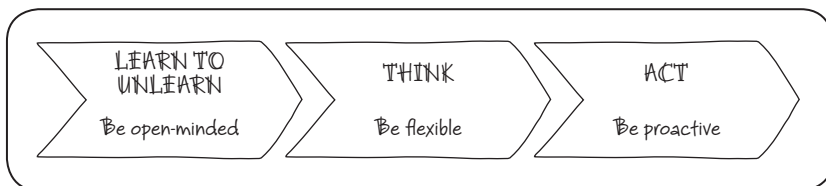
While there are many things you need to do in order to succeed in a fast-changing world, I think there are three core skills you must commit to in order to adapt to change.

Together, these core skills will set you up to succeed in a future that you're unable to predict but can be certain will be different from where you are now (as illustrated in figure 5.1).

- *Learn to unlearn: be open-minded.* Be ready to unlearn and let go of old rules and assumptions about how things work and what's possible.

- *Think: be flexible.* Stretch yourself to adapt to change and be ready to yield to the wind and try new approaches.
- *Act: be proactive.* Change before you have to, by preparing for future changes, and be open to embracing the new.

Figure 5.1: the three core skills needed for adapting to change



Learn to unlearn: be open-minded

Early in 2012, after more than 10 years of living in the United States, my family and I returned to live in Melbourne, a city that I'd lived in for only one year over the previous 17 (and that was the year my first child was born, so my memories are encased in a sleep-deprived fog). As I soon discovered, my mental maps of Melbourne's road system, good cafés, restaurants and shopping centres were in dire need of an update. While I'd kept my old *Melway* street directory from the 1990s I quickly realised I needn't have bothered. Not only was my *Melway* woefully out of date for many parts of the city—which had transformed from industrial wastelands into vibrant urban centres—but several new, big toll roads, complete with tunnels and bridges, had been built, totally changing the routes around the city.

Thank God for the satellite navigation system in my new car! Needless to say, from driving on the other side of the road to enrolling my kids in new school systems and sports, since arriving back in Melbourne I've had to do a lot of learning, but I've had to do even more 'unlearning' in order to undergo the required 'relearning'. I could never have learned how to navigate around the city had I kept relying on my mental maps or my old street directory. I had to donate the latter to the recycling bin and declare myself a novice navigator before I could once again become a competent one. I'm pleased to say that I can now make my way to the airport without any wrong turns (on a good day!).

We're all born with an intense desire to learn. Babies stretch and grow their skills daily. Not just ordinary skills, but the most complex tasks possible: learning to walk and talk! Sure, their nimble brains are wired for it, but their egos have yet to develop and decide that the mistakes required to attain mastery are all too embarrassing for the effort. They walk, they fall, they get up. They just barge forward, bang their head, have a cry, then barge forward again. Likewise, you've probably seen children as young as two and three manoeuvring their way around their parents' iPhones with a speed and precision that leaves you feeling like the digital immigrant, born in a previous millennium, that you are. They just tinker with things until they've worked it out. For children, free of pride and a need to preserve their public persona, the learning curve isn't something to be avoided or hastened, but rather to be travelled along until they have attained the mastery they want.

The most important lessons lay not in what I needed to learn, but in what I first needed to unlearn.

Jim Collins

Somewhere along the line though, many of us lose our love of learning. The pressure to excel in school with its ever-pressing emphasis on test scores can rob the enjoyment from the process of learning itself. Whatever the reasons, once they have the basics covered, many people tend to stick with what they know and avoid situations or challenges where they may mess up or be forced to learn something new. So they create a safe, secure and comfortable (and confining) world for themselves. In it, they do their best to mould the changes going on around them—in people, events and the general environment—to fit with their current 'mental maps'. They may say they're open to change, but do their best to avoid it. For a while, that strategy can work fairly well. What it doesn't do is set them up well for adapting to a future that may well require an entirely new set of maps.

As any ex-typewriter repairperson will tell you, refusing to acknowledge that the world is changing will eventually land you in a difficult place with few options and a lot of forced learning, such as how to get a new job with a skillset or knowledge that's

lost its value. Or how to live on a minimum wage. When you resist learning, unlearning and relearning the options available to you, from a career standpoint at least, can narrow greatly. Sometimes they can disappear altogether. When it comes to adapting to change, delay is increasingly expensive.

Develop learning agility

If you're not learning, you're not advancing. If you're not learning, you quickly lose your place in a world that's forever marching steadily forwards.

Success in today's world isn't just about how well, how much or how fast you can learn. The rate of change today is so fast that your ability to unlearn and relearn is more important than any other aspect of learning.

We can all acquire bucketloads of knowledge just by sitting on Wikipedia all day. But acquiring new knowledge isn't sufficient for succeeding in a wired-up world that uploads more information to the web each day than existed in all the world's books 100 years ago. With your computer, or even your smartphone, you have more information at your fingertips than you can process in your lifetime, much less retain or put to any practical use.

In 1992 Bill Clinton declared that if you just 'work hard and play by the rules' you'll get ahead, have a good life and pave the way for your kids to have an even better one. It's a nice thought and one that resonates with most people. Unfortunately, it's no longer true. When Clinton made this declaration the internet was only beginning to emerge, few people used email and students were still relying on encyclopedias to research their school projects. It was a world in which technology had yet to revolutionise traditional ways of doing business, a world where working remotely was still a rarity and many people stayed in jobs for life.

Much has changed since then, including the idea that playing by the rules is what gets you ahead. Getting ahead today requires lifelong learning, and that includes unlearning the old rules and relearning new ones. It requires emptying the melting pot of assumptions about how things work, 'unlearning' what you already know and making space to 'relearn' whatever is truly relevant in your job, your industry, your career and your life.

Learning agility is the name of the game. And in the game of life, where the rules are changing fast, your ability to be agile in letting go of old rules and learning new ones is increasingly important. Learning agility is the key to unlocking your change proficiency and succeeding in an uncertain, unpredictable and constantly evolving environment, personally and professionally. There are countless things you may have to unlearn in your job, business and career, even in the course of the next 12 months.

- Unlearn the designs you use.
- Unlearn the methodology you use.
- Unlearn the technology you use.
- Unlearn the way you approach your brand.
- Unlearn the way you communicate your unique value.
- Unlearn who your target market is, what they want and why.
- Unlearn how to get the most from your colleagues or employees.

Unlearning is about moving away from something—letting go—rather than acquiring. Jiddu Krishnamurti, a well-known Indian philosopher, believed that ‘truth is a pathless land’ and devoted much of his life to freeing his followers from their conditioned responses. Likewise, the process of unlearning is about liberation or freedom from what we think we know. It’s a bit like scraping the old paint off a wall before you apply a fresh colour. If you haven’t stripped back the old paint, the new layer can’t stick. Unlearning is like stripping old paint. It lays the foundation for the new layer of fresh learning to be acquired and to stick. But as any painter will tell you, stripping the paint is 70 per cent of the work, while repainting is only 30 per cent.

Accordingly, the key to learning, unlearning and relearning doesn’t lie with the teacher. It lies with the student, with you: in your openness to learning, to being challenged and to letting go of knowledge that the passage of time has rendered obsolete (however hard you studied or worked to acquire it!). Likewise, as you read this book there will be ideas and concepts that resonate with you and that you’ll find useful. There will also be ones that won’t. That’s

okay. You don't have to agree with, much less retain, everything you read in this book or anywhere else. Nor should you. Whatever you get from it will be exactly what you need for where you are in your working life right now. While some things will resonate, also pay attention to the concepts you find yourself most resistant to. Sometimes the ideas we react to with the greatest resistance are those that hold the most valuable lessons.

While it may go without saying, you don't need to unlearn everything you know. I may have needed to unlearn many of my old street maps for getting around Melbourne, but I didn't have to unlearn them all. Nor would it have served me to unlearn how to drive my car. By the same token, you don't want to learn everything either. Nor could you. What's important is to be willing to unlearn only what isn't serving you so you can relearn what will. Likewise, if you try to anticipate every change going on around you, you'll become so overwhelmed that you may miss the one that's right in front of you.

Flip your assumptions

Take a moment to amuse yourself with these statements and think about the lens through which those who made them viewed the world:

- *Everything that can be invented already has been invented.*
Charles H. Duell, Director of US Patents Office, 1899
- *Sensible and responsible women do not want to vote.*
President Grover Cleveland, 1905
- *There is no likelihood man can ever tap the power of the atom.*
Robert Milken, Nobel Laureate (Physics), 1923
- *Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible.*
Lord Kelvin, President of the England Royal Society, 1885.

Needless to say, time has proven all of these statements wrong—laughably wrong in fact (that's why I included them!). But had you lived at the same time, or even been an expert yourself in the same field as these people, it's probable you would have viewed the world through a similar lens and agreed with them. Many did. Their statements were, after all, the consensus opinion of many

of the most brilliant minds of their time—minds likely no less brilliant than yours and very likely more brilliant than mine. And yet we know now that the things they held as ‘the truth’ were invalid assumptions based on limited and inaccurate information.

According to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* an assumption is ‘something you accept as true without question or proof’. As you’re reading this now you have countless assumptions running in your life. Many of them serve you, and most likely at least a few of them don’t. Unchallenged assumptions can limit you because where you’re coming from often predetermines where you end up. That is, the assumptions that are guiding your choices today will impact where you find yourself in the future. It’s possible one day you’ll look back and wish you’d challenged some of them more vigorously. Common assumptions that I’ve heard people make which impair their willingness to change aspects of their career and work, and create a more meaningful career are:

- ‘I’m too old to ... (change careers, go back to study)’
- ‘I’m too young to ...’
- ‘I can’t just go and ask my boss to take on this challenge’

I remember when my husband and I were considering having a fourth child. With three young children I was very aware of just how demanding parenting babies and young children can be. I recall a conversation with my sister where I shared how, as much as I’d like to have a fourth child, it just wouldn’t be possible to do that and start down a new career path in coaching.

‘I just can’t see how I can do both,’ I remember saying. Fortunately, I have a supportive husband and some wonderful female friends brave enough to challenge my thinking. My friend Janet said, ‘Sure you can. I have a girlfriend who has four kids and runs a car dealership. You’re every bit as capable as she is’. Another friend told me about her obstetrician who also had four children while working in a demanding profession. Hearing about these women helped me realise that what I’d been assuming to be true simply wasn’t. Not only did I need to let go of the assumption that I couldn’t do it, but I needed to let go of my ideas on *how* I

would do it—by getting more help, doing much of my shopping online, getting up earlier, stocking up on kids' birthday gifts and generally running my home more efficiently as well as accepting that 'good enough is often good enough'.

Like the queen in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* who thought of impossible things for half an hour each day, you want to train your mind to be more open to ideas that, at first, seem impractical, impossible or outright absurd. Practise letting your mind wander and come up with as many ideas as you can, however absurd they may seem. Relaxing your standards and letting your imagination off its leash while you generate ideas increases your openness and enhances creativity. If you think of a hundred stupid, impossible ideas but one of them works, then consider it time well spent! When nothing is sure, everything becomes possible.

Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties.

Erich Fromm

Whenever Thomas Edison interviewed a job applicant, he would take them to lunch, where he would order them a bowl of soup. Then, as he asked them questions about why they would be the best candidate for the job, he would pay careful attention to whether they would season their soup before tasting it. If they did, he would not hire them. He believed that if they had to season their soup before even tasting it, they were operating from so many built-in assumptions about everyday life that it would take far too long to train ('untrain' and 'retrain') them to approach their job with the level of creativity he felt they needed to be successful.

Edison's invention of a practical way of lighting, involving wiring circuits in parallel and then using high-resistance filaments in light bulbs, had never been considered by anyone else. It wasn't that others had assumed it wouldn't work; they just hadn't ever thought of it. But because Edison refused to work with any assumptions, he wasn't constrained in anything he did. The result is that you have light bulbs throughout your home right now as you read this!

Adapt or die: Kodak's cautionary tale against complacency

Kodak was a pioneer in digital imaging technology, introducing the first digital camera in 1975. Rather than capitalise on the opportunity of being first to market, Kodak chose to keep its business focused on its lucrative film business. It was to become a costly choice, along with a textbook case study of change resistance.

Wind forward 15 years to the early 2000s when digital cameras were sweeping the market, Kodak's corporate literature still stated, 'The keys to Eastman's success in making photography a popular leisure-time activity for the masses were his development of roll film and the inexpensive box camera. Although film and cameras are far more sophisticated and versatile today, the fundamental principles behind Eastman's inventions have not changed'. It was another way of saying, 'We still aren't willing to change how we view photography—film photography is still king'.

By 2003, Kodak was forced to lay off 6000 employees globally after earnings plummeted. It was a catalyst to accept the new reality of digital photography, and Kodak set to work to become a leader in that market. By 2005, they'd succeeded in becoming the top seller of digital cameras in the US but continued to lag behind Sony and Canon in the global market and were never able to gain a foothold in the high-end digital camera market.

The demise of film photography and Kodak's sluggish response to the burgeoning digital photography market, combined with the rise and rise of the market-shrinking camera phone, permanently changed the playing field for Kodak. In 2011, with sales flagging and losses ballooning, Kodak's shares fell by over 80 per cent. Staff cutbacks ensued, reducing their global headcount to 19000 from a high of 145000. For industry analysts, it came as little surprise when, in early 2012, Kodak filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. In the months that followed they went on to exit not only the consumer photography market they'd pioneered, but the inkjet printer and document imaging business. (Yes, your old rolls of Kodak film will soon be collectors' items!)

Kodak CEO Antonio Perez stated that the 'reorganisation' was to 'to focus our business on the commercial markets and enable Kodak

to accelerate its momentum toward emergence'. Let's hope. At least for those employees still working for Kodak today. Whatever the future holds for Kodak, their experience tells a cautionary tale, for individuals and the organisations alike, against complacency, operating from outdated assumptions and resisting change in a continuously evolving marketplace.

Kodak is one of many examples of organisations that were too myopic in their focus, too rigid in their approach and too complacent in their attitude. It brings to mind other organisations whose failure to adapt—to learn, unlearn and relearn—has led to their demise. Think Borders bookstores, Blockbuster Video, Hollywood Video or my favourite Australian chocolate store, Darrell Lea.

Whatever your business, industry or profession, staying ahead of the game requires remaining vigilant about the changing rules of the game. You must be open-minded and flexible to adapt to changing forces and proactive in capitalising on their inherent opportunity. As W. Edward Deming once said, 'It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory'.

We human beings are assumption-making machines. We make assumptions on a daily basis. Doing so actually helps us to function effectively. However, the problem arises when we delude ourselves into thinking our assumptions are 'the truth'. When you reverse your assumptions you're forced to look for ways to explain just the opposite of what you've perceived to be true. Even if you ultimately can't agree that the opposite of your assumption is valid, it can still shift how you were seeing things.

Management guru Peter Drucker says managers should recognise the value of ignorance: 'You must frequently approach problems with your ignorance; not what you think you know from past experience, because not infrequently, what you think you know is wrong'. When I work with teams to help them build collaboration and effectiveness I often have them list and then reverse their assumptions, just to generate creative thinking. Being forced to approach something from a totally different angle often generates a level of creative thinking that ultimately leads to other ideas. These ideas can often be applied to solve problems and maximise opportunities in different parts of a business.

Vu déjà: see the familiar for the first time

You know that weird feeling? You find yourself in a situation and you could swear you've been there before, except you know you haven't. It's just not possible. That's *déjà vu*: looking at an unfamiliar situation and feeling you've seen it before. 'Vu déjà', a clever term originally coined by author Josh Linker, is just the opposite: looking at a familiar situation as if you've never seen it before.

Which isn't easy to do. That's because your brain is hardwired to play tricks on you. As any neurologist would tell you, your brain been uploaded with special 'pattern recognition' software that has it constantly scanning your environment and matching any patterns it sees with ones that are stored away in your memory bank. For the most part, this is a good thing because it enables you to function efficiently: every time you see a stop sign you don't even have to read it to know that you have to stop your car before proceeding further. When you see something, your first instinct is therefore to conclude that a pattern is the same as one you've seen before, which leads you to react the same way as you have before. The problem is that often this isn't the case, particularly when the environment you're operating in is changing rapidly.

For example, trying to sell a product or service to a customer the same way you did in the past may not produce the outcome you want in the future. Even when things are still managing to produce a satisfactory outcome, it still pays to look at a situation or problem with a fresh set of eyes. Philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote, 'It's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on things you have long taken for granted'.

Assumptions confine possibilities

In the 1980s, NASA challenged aerospace and defence company Lockheed Martin to cut, by several thousand kilograms, the weight of the huge fuel tank that formed the structural backbone of the space shuttle. The effort stalled at the last 360 kilograms. As the blue-ribbon engineering team turned its attention to increasingly exotic lightweight materials, one of the junior and less qualified line-workers suggested not painting the tank as a way to remove the extra weight. It seemed a bit too simple, and one can only assume there were a few PhD engineers whose

initial response was to dismiss such a simple solution outright. But as it turned out, the 760 litres of white paint that was to be used to cover the tank would have added close to 360 kilograms to a device whose lifespan in flight was about eight minutes and whose fate was to end up at the bottom of the Indian Ocean. Such is the power of looking at a problem with new eyes and without old assumptions.

Indeed, sometimes the best way to think outside the box is to listen to someone who lives outside the box. People often discuss important ideas with the same inner circle of colleagues, but in doing that you can miss obvious answers. Someone with less expertise and ‘inside knowledge’ than you may see beyond others’ unquestioned assumptions right away. (If you have noticed any typos in this book it’s due to the same reason. Writers, and sometimes even highly experienced editors, can get so close to the work that they miss what is blaringly obvious to someone reading it for the first time. Not that I’m making an excuse for my typos—just providing a reason!)



Practise vu déjà

Think of a situation, problem or opportunity you’re facing. Now imagine you were approaching it as each of the following people might and see what different perspective, insights and solutions occur to you.

- You’re someone you have always admired as being really wise, strategically brilliant or insightful about the things you care about (for example, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, George Washington, Warren Buffett, your favourite writer). How do you see it now?
- You’re Doc from *Back to the Future* and you’re 30 years in the future looking at this situation as it is today. How do you see it?
- You’re [choose a profession different from your own: builder, pilot, sales representative, designer, teacher]. What do you notice differently?
- You’re a brand-new employee, eager to learn, explore and experiment. What ideas come to mind?

It will always serve you to find intelligent people with little knowledge of your business, industry, profession or situation and talk through whatever you're working on now. You may be surprised by the solutions they help you discover.

Think: be flexible

When it comes to adapting to change and finding the opportunity it holds 'blessed are the flexible for they shalt not get bent out of shape'. The ancient Chinese text of the *Tao Tè Ching* says, 'Whatever is flexible and flowing will tend to grow'.

If you always respond the same way, you won't always respond the best way.

When you choose to go with the flow of change, you free yourself from being whirled around like leaves on a blustery autumn day. It enables you to choose the actions you'll take, or not take, the conversations you'll have, the requests you'll make and where you'll focus your energy from moment to moment. It also enables you to be that much more flexible in how you respond. Because you're not stuck in any fixed pattern of behaviour, you're not glued to any particular plan of action. You're a free agent, untethered and ready to adjust your sails to optimise your situation and to make the most of the prevailing tide and winds.

While having a plan can help you be more successful in achieving a goal, sticking to it rigidly can work against you. The better approach is to create what I call a 'flexi-plan' that you're open to changing as you get new information and circumstances change.

Be flexible amid changing circumstances

Professor E. J. Masicampo at Florida State University did a study that demonstrated the importance of flexibility in achieving goals amid changing circumstances. He essentially broke his subjects—a group of 98 students—into two groups. One group

was given a firm plan to achieve a specific goal of researching information online. The other group had the same goal but wasn't given any plan to follow.

Within the 'plan' and 'no-plan' groups, half of the individuals were given ample time to complete the task, while the other half had their time cut short. The 'plan' group with ample time was 95.5 per cent successful in finding the information they needed, well ahead of the 'no-plan' group (68 per cent). However, the 'no-plan' group's success rate (71.4 per cent) far outrated the 'plan' group's (36.7 per cent) when they were both given a warning that they would have to complete the task early. When the 'no-plan' group was informed their time was to be cut short, they very quickly adjusted what they were doing to find the information they needed, whereas those in the 'plan' group resisted deviating from their plan and were consequently far less successful.

So go ahead: make your plans, set your strategies, get into action, but be flexible and adaptable as you go along. Rigidity can be lethal.

Expand your repertoire

Try crossing your arms right now. Go on, put down this book and do it. Then try crossing them the opposite way. Harder than you thought, isn't it? We're all wired with automatic reflexes, responses and decision-making strategies when faced with seemingly familiar information or stimuli. This enables us to be more efficient. However, you can become too reliant on the same default ways of responding. In any area of life, the greater the number of ways you can respond to a situation, challenge, problem, person or opportunity, the more successful you will inevitably be.

Responding with flexibility and agility in our rapidly changing world requires an ongoing trade-off between your naturally preferred way of responding to a challenge and a way that isn't as natural and easy for you. For every strength you possess, there's an opposite strength or trait that balances it out. If you always respond in one way, and never the other, sometimes you'll respond ineffectively. Mental and emotional flexibility are crucial to changeability.

We all have our default style and approach of getting things done, solving problems and adapting to new circumstances. However, if you always approach your problems and challenges in the same way, you won't always approach them in the best way. The greater the range of approaches you can draw from, the better the outcomes you'll be able to achieve.



Widen your spectrum of responses

As you read through the list below, take note of the way you tend to respond to the changes and challenges in your life. What is your default preference? Consider how responding with its opposite may, on occasion, be more helpful to you, enabling you to be far more effective in achieving the result you want. Just because one way of approaching things has generally worked for you in the past, doesn't mean it will work for you now. Responding well to change requires pulling from the full spectrum of emotional and mental alternatives.

- self-starting—self-stopping
- critical—accepting
- sensitive—tough
- initiating—following
- forceful—gentle
- cautious—bold
- task oriented—relationship oriented
- structured—unstructured
- outgoing—introspective
- planned—spontaneous
- impulsive—thorough
- compliant—noncompliant
- serious—playful
- creative—analytical

The world's top tennis players have developed mastery across the various tennis strokes. Not only must they serve brilliantly, but they must also slice, smash, lob and volley masterfully. Sure, they each still have their favourite shots, those they can execute better than any other player—Serena Williams's power serve or Federer's one-handed backhand, for instance—but they know

that a brilliant backhand or a killer serve isn't enough. To be competitive against their top-ranked opponents, they have to be strong across the board. The same applies for other competitive sports. After winning the 1997 Masters Gold Tournament by an unprecedented 12 strokes, Tiger Woods set out to further finetune his golf swing so that he could achieve even greater success. As good as he was, he knew he could be better if he strengthened his golf swing.

*Only in growth, reform and change, paradoxically enough,
is true security to be found.*

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

According to Malcolm Gladwell, author of *The Tipping Point*, it takes 10 000 hours to achieve a level of true mastery. For athletes, this means mastery not just of those shots they are naturally strong at, but those that don't come as naturally to them. They have to be able to pull from a repertoire of different responses in responding to their competitors. So too it is in every domain of life. In reality there's never only one way of responding to a challenge—there are many. It's just that some responses will generate a better outcome than others. And so it's a matter of simple logic that the greater number of options you can draw from—the more alternative ways of responding to a challenge, problem or even to an opportunity—the higher the probability that your response will produce an optimal outcome versus an ordinary one.

Look at the most successful people you know and you'll notice that when it comes to change, they have the greatest number of different options available to them for responding. They know that to successfully navigate the twists and turns of life they must be agile and willing to approach things in different ways, depending on the circumstances; responding in the same way to something again and again will eventually cause grief and fail to produce the desired result. So, if you're feeling some grief right now, while it's comfortable to approach your challenges in the same way you have done so many times in the past, if you're finding yourself with a recurring challenge, consider how approaching it in a different (albeit less comfortable and familiar) way may produce a better outcome.

Unlearning organisational change

For reasons that have never been clear, 60 million years ago dinosaurs suddenly disappeared after more than 100 million years on the planet. Palaeontologists have hotly debated the cause of the dinosaur's extinction, but high on the list of hypotheses is their failure to adapt to rapidly changing climatic conditions—particularly temperature. If a failure to adapt was the dinosaur's Achilles heel, then the dinosaur is not alone in the history of evolution.

In his book *The Living Company*, Arie de Geus wrote, 'In the future, an organisation's ability to learn faster than its competitors may be its only sustainable competitive advantage'. Today's pace of change in business conditions may or may not be unprecedented, but it is surely spectacular and likely to accelerate from here. Like most things in business, rapid change is a two-edged sword: a threat but also an opportunity. Adapt to rapid change better than your competitors and you can make great strides; ignore rapidly changing circumstances and expect to go the way of the slide rule, horse and buggy, wind-up watch or dinosaur. Adapting may be difficult, but it's not impossible.

Organisations, large and small, that are most likely to be successful in leveraging change—internal and external—to their advantage are the ones that no longer view change as a discrete event to be managed but as a constant opportunity to evolve their business or enterprise. Whether it's an external change such as a new technology or tightening economy, or an internal one such as a restructuring or process overhaul, change readiness has replaced change management. It's the ability to continually initiate and respond to change in ways that generate an advantage, minimise risk and not only sustain, but elevate, performance. Adapting isn't therefore something to be done every few years, but something to be done every day.

Keeping up with, and adapting to, the ever-changing environment—whether in your direct workplace, across larger organisations or in the marketplace—requires a fundamental shift in how you approach learning, and a willingness to sometimes be okay with 'not knowing'. Learning, unlearning and relearning must not be regarded as a means to an end but as an end in itself—one that's fundamental to your ability as an individual, and collectively in your team or organisation—if you're to remain relevant to all stakeholders.

Author Spencer Johnson states, 'A change imposed is a change opposed'. Guiding your team or organisation through change requires thoughtful planning and an acute awareness of the underlying concerns and fear that those you're shepherding through change will feel. It's important to do the following:

- *Explain the why.* One of the biggest reasons why people resist change initiatives is because they don't understand what it's trying to achieve. Leaders need to explain the purpose of change and help people understand why the change will ultimately serve them through improving the organisation's long-term profitability. Until employees are sure why the change is even necessary they'll have a tough time embracing it and getting on board with the transition.
- *Clarify the vision.* As people try to come to terms with an unknown and uncertain future, it's important to provide them with as much information as possible on what the organisation will look like when it comes through the other end of the change process. Where are the new roles? What will the new structure look like? What's the time frame for the change to take place? Is training necessary? How much? Why type? What's expected now? The clearer the strategy and plan, the better employees will respond, and the less resistance you will get.
- *Acknowledge concern.* Classic psychological reactions to change move from denial to anger to bargaining to depression and then to acceptance. All sources of resistance to change need to be acknowledged and people's emotions validated. Sometimes people question the motives of would-be reformers, so far better to anticipate resistance and objections than to spend your time putting out fires.
- *Enlist involvement.* When confronted with a change in their organisation, the first thought of most employees is 'How will this impact me?' The second: 'How can I benefit from it?' So if you're leading a group, the best way to get people engaged in the change is to get them involved in it! Assemble a 'transition team' of influencers to see the whole process through. They in turn can get others onboard so that you or they can demonstrate how the new way can work. Pilot

programs that model a change and work out any kinks before launching can be valuable. Ultimately people can be cynical if all they get is rhetoric, and so more demonstration can counter resistance, overcome anxiety and move people from 'It can't be done' to 'How do we do it?'

Act: be proactive

While it's important to be flexible and 'go with the flow', it's just as important not to be complacent. Assuming the skills and knowledge that got you to where you are today will get you to where you want to be five years from now could be a career limiting mistake. What got you here will not get you there—not with the pace of change that's going on around you. Rather, you have to actively engage in ensuring that the skills and knowledge that will be valued most highly in the future align with those you have to offer. My message here: don't rest on your laurels—be proactive!

Upgrade your skillset

Being highly skilled at what you do is always a good thing. It's likely what enabled you to get to where you are today. Sometimes, though, you can get so good at operating in a particular skill area that you don't adapt that knowledge to apply it to different kinds of problems and situations. It's not that you're intentionally lazy or arrogant, but you've just never seen the need to spend time on developing other skills or knowledge in areas besides that which was immediately relevant to the job you were doing. Besides, why bother having to go through the learning curve in a new domain of expertise, and risk looking foolish or failing, unless you have to? In 'the good old days' people could afford to take this approach far more than they can today. Banking your career on brilliance in one particular area can be very limiting and highly risky in a world where having skills and knowledge across a broad range of areas is becoming more and more standard and expected.

In a time of drastic change, it is the unlearners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.

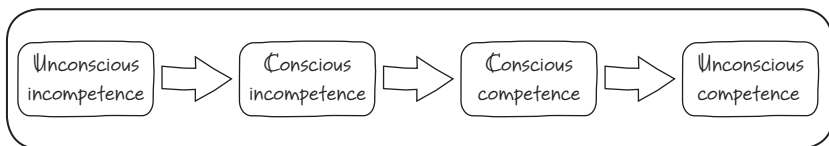
Eric Hoffer

As more people spend less time with any one company, HR managers are looking more for growth on a CV than a linear progression within the one organisation. While lifelong learning is not a new concept, if you have more breadth on your CV, rather than just depth, it may stand you in good stead. As Rosemary Howard, from the Australian Graduate School of Management, said ‘Knowing what’s going on in a different discipline is very important’.

While you may well feel the skills you possess today have you set up to succeed in the future, I encourage you to stay open to expanding your existing skills and knowledge. It seems there’s a reverse correlation with age and tolerance for the time and practice required to become proficient in any skillset. Be realistic about learning something new.

The four stages of learning outlined in figure 5.2 show the process we all have to go through to become adept at any new skill or area of expertise. We often start out not even being aware of what we don’t know (‘unconscious incompetence’). Once we commit to learning we become conscious of our incompetence (like I did the day I switched from PC to Mac). Over time we become consciously competent until we arrive at a point where we’re unconsciously competent (as I am now on my computer). Too often we exit the learning cycle at the stage of conscious incompetence, unwilling to go through the awkward and uncomfortable process of learning. But as Thomas Fuller wrote back in the 16th century, ‘All things are difficult before they are easy’. Growth and comfort rarely ride the same horse: commit to staying on whatever horse you’re learning to ride, keep practising, and eventually you’ll do with ease what was once difficult.

Figure 5.2: the four stages of learning



As the global economy evolves and market forces drive competition for jobs to new levels, it’s the people who have proactively worked

to expand and diversify their skillsets who will be most well placed. When you synthesise your knowledge and skills well, it turns you from a knowledge expert into a knowledge entrepreneur. *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman wrote, ‘Everyone has to bring something extra; being average is no longer enough. Everyone is looking for employees who can do critical thinking and problem solving...just to get an interview. What they are really looking for are people who can invent, re-invent and re-engineer their jobs while doing them’.

Companies today aren’t managing their employees’ careers as they once were. You have to be CEO of your own career, carve out your own place, keep yourself engaged and decide when to change course throughout your working life. The better you are at reinventing your role and adapting to ever-changing working environments and job challenges, the more highly you’ll be valued and the more opportunities you’ll create for yourself to advance.

My friend Nicolle Geller, who is CEO of Government Contract Solutions (GCS), makes it a practice to regularly read a diverse variety of books and blogs. She enjoys listening to people who work in different industries and have different areas of expertise. She often attends conferences where speakers who speak on various trends share their insights. While not everything relates directly to her business, which provides acquisition and program management and contracts management solutions to the US federal government, it all helps to broaden her thinking and stimulate different ways of building her business and preparing to make the most of the opportunities that the ever-changing market, the economy and technology provide.

Today, more than ever, people need to be both a CEO of their own career and an entrepreneur within their organisation. Don’t leave your career in the care of HR, your boss or anyone else.

This leads to yet another change in the job market—requiring even more skills of tomorrow’s knowledge workers—which is that companies will increasingly rely on part-time, contract and freelance employees as an alternative to hiring full-time employees.

This means more and more of tomorrow's knowledge workers will, whether they want to or not, have to run their own companies or partner with others to create small business-services companies. Not only will they need the skills required to manage a business, they must also have the skills required to work independently. Most importantly, they'll need the skills to continually market and sell themselves, their ideas and their unique skillsets. Indeed, in your career you have to step through your reservations about self-promotion, advocate for what it is you want to do and let those you're working for know how you can add even more value than you currently are.

You can be an entrepreneur within an organisation, or you can be an entrepreneur outside of it. Just don't expect anyone else to be taking care of your career path, advocating for your success and giving you a step-by-step template for how to do your job well so that you can advance to the next one. That's totally up to you. Own your success. Own your career. Own your job. Don't let any 'job description' prevent you from doing more than you're currently being paid to do. Nothing will differentiate you more from those around you than showing that you're a person ahead of your time who can be counted on to spot emerging opportunities, see potential problems and find innovative ways of solving them.

While your parents may have had jobs for life, it's estimated that most workers today change jobs every seven years. Many far more often than that. Needless to say, fewer and fewer people stay with the same company their entire working lives. But whether you never change your career path or you change it a dozen times, being open to working in different types of roles, in different types of industries and acquiring new skills and knowledge as you go can only be a good thing.

Complacency is more dangerous today than ever before. So even if you don't feel threatened in any way by the changes around you, you'll still find that investing in your own skills and knowledge is a smart move. Make it a habit to attend conferences, participate in professional groups or enrol in a course that introduces you to information and skills you may otherwise never know about. Not only are these experiences career enhancing, but they can revitalise your approach.

Look for cracks: act or be acted upon

Lamplighters, switchboard operators, typesetters, icemen, buggy builders, copy boys, elevator operators, carriage drivers, telegraph operators... these are all jobs that became obsolete. The reality is that jobs and careers evolve over time, requiring you to adapt your ideas about 'career'. Certainly in many companies today, traditional career paths have gone the way of the dodo, especially those in newly created technology and online jobs. Expecting a step-by-step map for the next year, much less 25 years, is simply unrealistic. You have to take more ownership for mapping out a path of your own that may well veer off the traditional 'career path' but which may be far more interesting than any traditional (and predictable) path ever could be.

People who find opportunities in a changing environment are those who are actively looking for them. They don't wait to be told what they have to do—they're out looking at how they can change what they do in order to add more value and be more effective. The point I'm trying to make is: *act or be acted upon*. Waiting for your boss to tell you what they need from you doesn't set you up for success or differentiate you from anyone else. Employers want people with the initiative to expand their role and identify needs that they may not yet be able to see. They need to know that they're hiring someone dependable who can deal with a variety of different challenges and succeed in a fluid environment. As you advance in your career, you need to be willing to take on a diversity of different roles. If you can't adapt to being in a particular position, you're going to limit the variety of positions available to you in the future.

When asked about his success, ice hockey star Wayne Gretzky explained, 'I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been'. Of course the challenge is to know where the hockey puck is going to be! There are opportunities in the future that we can't yet quite imagine, but by looking around our immediate environment and taking note of the problems people are dealing with and the changes in the way we do things, we can start to anticipate where there will be needs and problems in the future that are yet to fully emerge. Similarly, the jobs of the future have not yet been imagined, much less created or had job descriptions written for them. Look for cracks in the infrastructure of your

company and industry. What are they doing that they could be doing better? What problems are there that need fixing? Given the way things are changing, what problems are likely to arise in the future? How can you find solutions to the problems?

Be cognisant of changes in your industry and career field. Notice the market trends and shifts in buyer behaviour. Keep abreast of the latest thinking and future predicted trends that may impact not just on your current role, but the roles you may move into in the future. The opportunity in today's job market is that you have more ability to write your own job description and create roles for yourself simply by being proactive, spotting problems that need to be fixed, anticipating future needs and taking the initiative to come up with innovative ways of filling them. Tenacity is an attribute that will set you apart when it comes to solving problems and bring unique value to your job, your boss, your team and your organisation.

Set realistic expectations

Change, wanted or not, is the only constant you can truly rely upon. And change, wanted or not, is something you must learn to navigate, adapt to and embrace if you're to not just survive but thrive in your career and life. But set realistic expectations: if you find yourself dealing with change, whether it be change you initiated (moving into a new career), change you were hoping for (landing yourself a promotion) or change that was thrust upon you (being told you no longer have your job or being assigned to a role you would never have chosen), don't be hard on yourself when you find yourself feeling less than robust. As I've learnt myself over the years, most recently moving my family to the opposite side of the world, when your world tilts on its axis it usually throws you off balance. At least for a while.

As my friend Elizabeth Keeler said to me as I packed up my home in Virginia, 'Be kind to yourself'. Beating yourself up doesn't help your cause. Rather, take a few big, deep breaths, reconnect with what matters most and then focus on the next step. Whether you're adapting to huge changes in your career and life, or just making some small tweaks as you continue on your current path, what matters most isn't how fast you're moving but that you're moving in the right direction.

Key points

- › Those who can unlearn old paradigms and relearn relevant skills and expertise will reap the rewards and seize the opportunities inherent in change.
- › History has shown that unless you are constantly questioning the assumptions you have about how the world works, you can miss out on opportunities and quickly get left behind.
- › As technology and globalisation continue to reshape the world, what's required to succeed will continue to evolve. The skills and knowledge that got you to where you are today will be insufficient to take you where you want to go in the future.
- › You have to be your own CEO, carve out your own place, keep yourself engaged and decide when to change course throughout your working life.
- › Complacency at both an organisational and individual level can be very costly.
- › Fear of the unknown, of loss, of failure and even of success drives our resistance to change.
- › Learning to be comfortable with the inherent discomfort of change enables you to handle it and emerge from it better.
- › When confronted with change—whether its change you've chosen or change that has been imposed—be patient with yourself as you adjust to the new reality it brings.
- › The three core skills for adapting to change are:
 - *Learn to unlearn: be open-minded.* Be ready to unlearn and let go of old rules and assumptions about how things work and what's possible.
 - *Think: be flexible.* Stretch yourself to adapt to change and be ready to yield to the wind and try new approaches.
 - *Act: be proactive.* Change before you have to by preparing for future changes, and be open to embracing the new.

About the Author

A *Forbes* columnist, best-selling author and media commentator, Margie Warrell is an internationally recognised thought leader in human potential who is passionate about challenging people to live and lead with greater courage.

Drawing from her background in business, psychology and coaching, along with her diverse personal experiences, Margie supports individuals and organisations globally to expand their vision, engage in bigger conversations and make a more meaningful contribution. Her clients include Hitachi, Accenture, United Healthcare, NASA, Bechtel, British Telecom, ExxonMobil, Best Buy, and Wells Fargo Bank. She has also been a regular guest lecturer at the Georgetown University in Washington DC and Southern Methodist University in Texas.



The best-selling author of *Find Your Courage: 12 Acts for Becoming Fearless in Work and Life*, Margie is a sought-after media commentator who regularly contributes her expertise on leading media outlets including The Today Show, FOX News, CNN and CNBC. Her advice has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Week*, *Washington Post*, *Sunday Telegraph* and *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Margie has also contributed to two other books with renowned experts Stephen Covey, Ken Blanchard, John Gray and Jack Canfield.

Margie is the founder of Global Courage, an organisation focused on empowering women to become more powerful catalysts for change and leaders within their organisations, community and society.

As a mother of four busy (and noisy) children and an intrepid traveller who grew up on a dairy farm in rural Victoria, Margie walks her talk when it comes to living boldly and challenging what's possible. In 2012 Margie returned to Australia after a decade based in the United States so her children could spend more time on 'Grandpa's farm'. A popular keynote speaker, she travels widely with her work and still enjoys returning to the US regularly where she is getting to know the immigration officials at LA airport on a first-name basis.

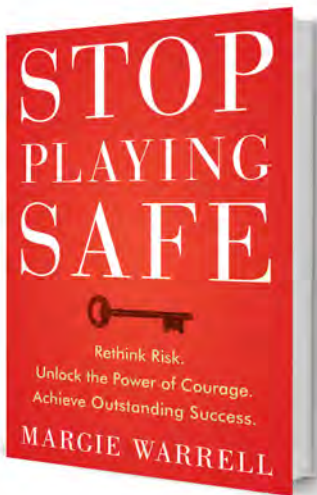
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STOP PLAYING SAFE

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Achieve Outstanding Success

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Tap the power of courage and achieve greater clarity, confidence and satisfaction in your work and life

Considering the current state of the global economy, it's easy to see why so many people and companies have become shy about sticking their necks out. But taking risks is what the free enterprise system is all about—it's about the courage to enthusiastically face the challenges to success and to embrace the opportunities that abound. In *Stop Playing Safe*, best-selling author, Forbes columnist and master coach, Margie Warrell, shares her prescription for awakening the lion within you. You'll learn to screw your courage to the sticking place and sally forth with clarity, spirit, commitment, and confidence.

The Author

Margie Warrell is a Forbes columnist, best-selling author, sought-after media commentator and an internationally recognised thought leader in human potential. With her background in coaching, psychology and working with Fortune 500 companies, Margie supports individuals and organisations globally to live and lead more courageously and achieve outstanding success.

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What could you achieve if you were more courageous?

We are hardwired to avoid risk but in an increasingly uncertain and competitive world, the true key to success is courage—the courage to speak up and challenge the status quo, the courage to take career-building risks, and the courage to seize the opportunities all around us.

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MARGIE WARRELL is a *Forbes* columnist, best-selling author, sought-after media commentator and an internationally recognised thought leader in human potential. With her background in coaching, psychology and working with Fortune 500 companies, Margie supports individuals and organisations globally to live and lead more courageously and achieve outstanding success.

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