



# RENEW YOURSELF

A Six-Step Plan *for* More  
Meaningful Work

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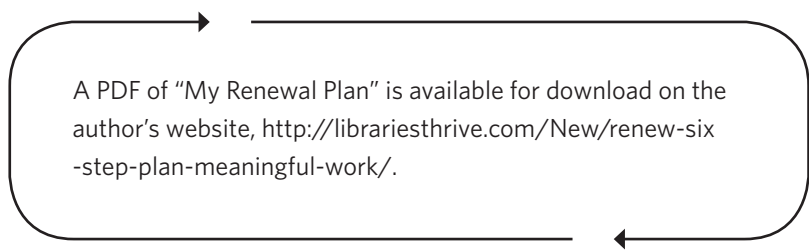
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 A PDF of “My Renewal Plan” is available for download on the author’s website, <http://libraries thrive.com/New/renew-six-step-plan-meaningful-work/>.

(LIBRARIAN TO A CUSTOMER WHO IS RETURNING A BOOK ON LIFE):

“Are you finished with this? Are you returning it?”

(CUSTOMER’S RESPONSE):

“No, I’m not finished. I’m going to renew it.  
I’d like to get more out of it this time around.”

# PREFACE

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## Why Did I Write This Book?

This book is not about how to quit your job and go live on the beach and sell souvenir seashells. It's about meeting a much more real and pressing need to not *just work*, but to be happier and more fulfilled while doing it.

I'm lucky. In my work, I am privileged to have the chance to travel around the country, helping new leaders build skills, helping teams strengthen, and helping organizations plan. Lots of times, all of this seems to begin to look like therapy. Why? Because the challenges I encounter and the stories I hear can rarely be solved by fixing the organization—but more often by strengthening *and renewing* the people who work in them.

No matter what their age, lots of people don't seem to really know what they want to be when they grow up. They're still searching, not to figure out what they love to do, but how to make it a part of their working life.

This book is for all those people I've known in my thirty-plus years spent working in libraries who have confided in me that, whether they're happy in their current job or they hate it, something *else* just seems to be missing. There's something inside them that they really, really want to do—to accomplish or to contribute, but they just don't know for sure what it is and they certainly don't have any idea how to go about finding out.

Hopefully, this book and its six-step process will help to resolve that problem.

This book isn't meant to be therapy. It's meant to be fun . . . and meaningful.

## Why Are You Reading It?

All the people I'm talking about have something in common—and you probably do too. They're filled with passion, skills, experience and drive—they're just lacking direction.

We all know that this isn't a dress rehearsal. We're on the clock . . . all of us . . . which is likely why you are reading this book in the first place. Have you ever said, "*I just don't know what I really want to do!*"? If so, I hope this book will help you to figure that out. You might find the answer by adding something special to what you do now. Or you may end up realizing you need a more significant change. Maybe, it's just a new department or title that you need—or perhaps it's something more significant than that.

The point is to really stop, read, and think about what you love the most and how you can use that to energize and *renew* yourself and your future. This book is a pathway to help you do just that. Or maybe you only want to figure out, once and for all, how to spend your time, talents, and energy. This book will help you do that, too.

What this book will *not* do is provide all the answers for you. You will do that yourself, by completing the reflections and exercises and developing your own, unique *Renewal Plan*. (The plan is in the back of this book, so you can go ahead and take a look at it, but don't be tempted to jump to filling it in on your own. Let this process do its work and help you spend the time you need to figure out just who you really are.)

If someone told you that by reading just a few pages and completing a six-step plan, you could find a way to feel more useful, more engaged, and just plain happier about getting up every morning, would you do it? I hope so. I can guarantee only one thing . . . you're worth it. We all are.



# INTRODUCTION



## How Does This Book Work?

One of the first things writers learn is to *keep it simple*.

Start with the basics, then build to the bigger picture. Reporters begin, then, by providing the *who, what, when, where, why, and how* of what they're trying to describe. If that's done well, the reader then becomes part of the story.

This book poses those questions and hopefully, as each reader does the work necessary to fill in the answers, even something as complex as finding more meaning in your life can be seen clearly.

Once our path is clear, we can achieve.

# 5W1H

---

There are a lot of complicated ways to consider how to move through life and work.

This isn't one of them.

Since you are the one who picked up this book, it's fair to say you just want to take another shot, not just at going through the motions every day, but at actually accomplishing something that matters.

Contrary to what most people grow up thinking, work and life are not mutually exclusive. Finding meaning in one—or the lack thereof—is going to impact the other. The good news is, at absolutely any point in your life, you can rewind and restart.

You can renew.

A great retirement greeting card reads “*Some people don't just make a career; they make a difference.*” That's what this book is going to help you do . . . and here's how. Let's talk a little bit more about 5W1H. As all young journalism students learn first, getting the answers to *who, what, when, where, why, and how* is the basic recipe for understanding any story. And your career, after all, is your story.

Put simply, “the five Ws and one H are questions whose answers are considered basic in information-gathering or problem-solving.”<sup>1</sup> That's why they are the very first thing new reporters learn, because they are the best formula for “getting the complete story.”<sup>2</sup> If they're good enough not only for the press, but for Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, and Rudyard Kipling,<sup>3</sup> then they should work for our process today. This book will delve into each of these steps more closely in the coming pages. What's important now is understanding what they can help you to do.

Do you want to (or do you have to) stay right where you are? Then this simple reexamination of your life might just help you to blend a

way to both pay the bills and have an impact doing something you love. Maybe you are choosing a career, deciding on a college, or picking a retirement date. No matter what the timing or direction, considering and identifying *your* story could make any of those decisions come out right not just for *you* but for your *purpose*.

As already promised, what will result from considering your story and completing the exercises in this book is your own personal *Renewal Plan*, which will provide you with both the incentive and the pathway to positive change.

Facebook has arguably become the new Burma Shave sign of our times and, recently, a particularly poignant thought—applicable to this journey—was shared. It read: *I expected getting old to take longer*.

But, in actuality, it doesn't. So, to do it right the first time, to do it in a way we can appreciate, enjoy, and be proud of, we need a map. Or a plan. Or a mapped-out plan that we can update periodically when life hands us a turn before the road actually curves. The plan you're about to create isn't just a fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice assignment. I'll prompt you in each section, helping you to develop your thoughts into action. One warning . . . be sure to not jump ahead. With each chapter you complete, you'll be thoughtfully considering some critical questions, all of which will point you towards your own success.

Sounds pretty simple, right? So do you really need to read a book to fill this out? Maybe not. But, in the process of filling in all these blanks, you're going to finally give yourself the time to really think about you, your values, your dreams, your goals, your realities, and your future. By working through each section in this book, you'll be developing an updated, focused, important revelation about how you want to matter.

The best part is, you may not even need to go anywhere or do anything differently to succeed in this plan. You don't have to quit your job. (Although you might end up taking a new job. Maybe.) You don't have to get another degree, develop an award-winning resume, or schmooze with movers and shakers (although any of those things *might* happen). You don't need a big new title or a corner office (although those might come along too, some day).

This is just a simple process to encourage you (and allow you) time to think, to consider, and then to act. Intentionally.

This book is about and for you. Period. Even if you're feeling stuck in a dead-end job with *no* chance to move on, you still have roughly sixteen *other* hours in your day that *you* control. You can fill those hours any way you want and still have time for the eight that pay the bills. Or, who knows, once you get the hang of this annual renewal, you can probably combine the two.

Some of the points in this book will be told as stories, and there is something you need to know about them. They're true. You might even see yourself in some of them. . .

*There was a woman in what many might consider a dead-end clerical job. With limited education, there wasn't anywhere else for her to go in that particular organization, so she could easily have become disillusioned, cynical, and even angry about her boring day-to-day tasks. (Sound like anyone you know?) But she was dedicated to lifting others up and so she became the in-house mentor for every new clerical hire. Unofficially, of course.*

*On her own time, she read about and developed mentoring and coaching skills far beyond what her current job description would have allowed. Unofficially, she took one new staffer after another under her wing and made sure they felt and were successful. They moved on, many of them, but they never forgot her kindness and support. And she never forgot how her engagement with them enhanced her day-to-day work. Although she is still in the same "paying" position today and is still doing the same tasks, she is renewed because she committed to making that difference. In her little spot of the world, she mattered.*

We all can.

So, how will this book help you to write your Renewal Plan? The answer is by keeping it simple—and going back to 5W1H, which go like this . . .

WHO  
WHAT  
WHEN  
WHERE  
WHY  
HOW

Once more, please, don't try to jump to the end of the book to fill out that plan. It'll be fun and rewarding to take your own life tour and come up with your own realities. Write in this book! Or, if you've borrowed it from a library, pick up a notebook you can use as you move along.

In the end, you may be focused on an entirely new project that sends you in a brand new direction, or else you'll know that your everyday actions are right on target. But, either way, that target—and you—will be renewed.

So, let's get to work on the first part of 5W1H . . . Who are you, really?

## NOTES

1. *Wikipedia*, s.v., “Five Ws,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five\\_Ws](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Ws).
2. *Ibid*.
3. “7 Key Questions: Who, What, Why, When, Where, How, How Much?—Consultant's Mind,” *Consultant's Mind*, July 24, 2015, [www.consultantsmind.com/2015/07/24/7-key-questions/](http://www.consultantsmind.com/2015/07/24/7-key-questions/).

## WHO ARE YOU?

When you know yourself, you are empowered.

When you accept yourself,

You are invincible.

—Tina Lifford

*She ducked into the elevator just in time to miss some latecomers walking into her party. Not that she didn't appreciate the attention; she knew they meant well. "Congratulations on ten years in Technical Services," the banner in the staff room read! And it had been a good ten years, at least in part. Anna was happy in her work and she was good at it.*

*But, as the doors closed and she was alone with her thoughts, she realized that the problem was that there was something missing. Day in, day out, this just wasn't who she was. She wished there was some other way to both pay the bills and . . . to matter.*

*Right now, there was work piling up on her desk. She'd tackle that first, then she'd start thinking about a way to find . . . more. If there was one thing she knew for sure, it's that the next ten years—and the ones after that—were going to fly by, too.*

### Introductions

The process you're going to experience throughout this book needs to start by looking backwards.

Are you just starting out on your career path and, with so many (or maybe so few) options to choose from, you're just not sure which way to go? Or perhaps you're feeling a little burned out (plateauing, as the experts call it) and you're thinking it's time for a change? Maybe you don't want too much of a change but would prefer to stay where

you are . . . and be just a little happier? Or perhaps you're at that new retirement stage that doesn't look anything like retirement used to look. You want to keep doing something, you think, but what?

Most everyone finds themselves in one of those spots at one time or another and that's why, lucky for us, there's a lot of good advice, mentoring, coaching, and information to help us move forward at every stage. So, what's the problem? The answers, no matter how well described, are never that easy to find. Most people do what they feel they're supposed to do when they think they're supposed to do it, and they put their personal ambitions aside for the common good. We can get to our dreams later, right?

Not always. The playing field is so very different today and the options are much wider. It's not that more options aren't there. It's just that most of us don't know how or don't take the time to look for them.

One thing's for sure, the traditional career ladder is gone. In its place in today's working world is a rock wall. I'm sure you can picture it and maybe you've even experienced traveling around it on your personal journey. You go forward a little and then up. Backwards and sideways and then down. Over and around and, pretty soon, you're at a staff room anniversary party that's for you, and you're not really sure how you got there . . . or why you stayed. The good news is, today's the day you can start making another move on the wall and this one can be for the right reasons.

A couple of points to get out of the way early on. This book is not a resume guide. This is not a list of job search tips or interview questions. As a matter of fact, this isn't really just a book at all—it's a project. And, as you work through it, it will put *you* more firmly, confidently, and intentionally in charge of your own future. Imagine a future that results in a *deliberate* career, one that mirrors your values, supports the life you want to live, and results in a contribution that matters to you.

Doesn't that sound better than *just* going to work?

But be forewarned: this book isn't meant to be just another quick read.

*Renewal*, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is “the state of being made new, fresh, or strong again.”<sup>1</sup> In short, it's a verb. You are going to work on *renewing yourself*, starting here and now. To get the most out of this book, please don't skip over the assignments embedded in each

section. By actually completing them, you'll be doing yourself a favor. You'll be finding an entirely new reason to get up every day and enjoy doing what you do.

You'll be making a living *and* making a difference.

So, let's start with that look back at how you got where you are today.

This book is predicated on the fact that, once you spend some time considering (or reconsidering, "renewing") what really matters to you, you can match it to how you want to spend the rest of your life and, therefore, pay the bills *and* find real joy.

If it's that simple, you might be wondering, why doesn't everyone do it? Well, many do. Executives leave high-paying, prestigious jobs to open food co-ops, and live happily ever after. Computer programmers turn into park rangers and accountants open day care centers for challenged kids. Take a look at this one—among many—examples. Roz Savage writes:

*Why would a woman in her mid-30s, with no previous record of either adventure or insanity, quit her job, leave her husband and home, and set out to row around the world? No doubt many of my friends, and most certainly my mother, asked themselves this in 2004 when I announced my intention to row across the Atlantic Ocean.*

*I went on to row across the Pacific from 2008 to 2010 and the Indian Ocean last year, being the first woman to row across each of the three oceans. During my time on the water, the reason for my decision became increasingly clear—I had suffered a double-whammy of revelations that simply made my previous life direction untenable.*

*First, I realized that my job, although it paid me well, was not making me happy. One day, I sat down and wrote two versions of my own obituary: the one I wanted to have, and the one I was heading for if I carried on my current path. My job was not taking me the way that I wanted to go. It was, in fact, taking me in the opposite direction, toward a life of tedium and obligation rather than one of freedom and fulfillment.<sup>2</sup>*

So, who are you?



## Things That Really Matter

“What are you going to major in?”

Ever been asked that? Or maybe you’ve heard the dreaded interview question, “Where do you see yourself in five years?” Or, even worse yet, “Tell me about yourself.”

These questions sound a lot easier than they are when we try to answer them succinctly. Who among us can say exactly what we hope to do—or even what we believe we’re capable of—when we first start out in life? And, as a result, our careers ride the waves of the current or the economy or family dynamics, rather than follow a track of our own choosing that can provide us with personal reward or achievement.

It doesn’t have to be that way. If we pause first (as you are doing right now) to think about who you really are and who you want to become, we can get back on our own road.

Great managers try hard to figure out what that road is when they’re interviewing and making those critical decisions about whom to hire. Organizations that care not only about the knowledge and skills they’re seeking but about the people will do so by trying to understand how the applicant sees herself. They might ask, “Tell us three words that describe you.” This is what is sometimes called a *so what* question, not because self-realization isn’t important, but because those three words are too easy to come up with and are rarely very telling. They often hear:

*I’m honest, hard-working, and creative.*

*I’m focused, experienced, and flexible.*

*I’m dependable, trustworthy, and experienced.*

But what those answers might actually be saying (without really meaning to) is:

*I’m practiced at interviewing, vague, and willing to try anything for a job.*

It’s not our fault. As busy people caught up in a demanding world, the reality is we don’t really know or often give much thought to who we are or what we want. For that reason, a much better interview question is, “Tell us *twenty* words that describe you.” At this level of depth, a lot more can be learned. Try it.

But wait. First, there's one more interview tactic to apply here. When looking for a librarian with excellent readers' advisory skills, managers will often qualify their questions, so as to eliminate the *easy* ones. They might ask, for example, "Other than Nora Roberts, Patricia Cornwell, or Janet Evanovich, name five other popular fiction writers." A question like this will give amateur librarians pause (Geez, those are the easy ones I would have said!) and will help experienced readers stand out with their extensive knowledge of books and writers. Twenty instead of three. Now that's some deeper thinking.

Try it. Other than being hard-working, honest, and dependable, what twenty words best describe *you*?

Author Shana Montesol Johnson has a bit more advice for anyone attempting to explore their values. She describes them first as "the interests and qualities that you've always found yourself drawn to."<sup>3</sup> Trying not to think of our personal values in the same way that word is used in a general sense, she suggests some questions or measures we can use to determine what our values really are. Ask:

- Do you want it, but it doesn't come easily? (Then it's probably a "should," not a value.)
- Are you doing it in order to get something else? (If yes, not a value.)
- Did you do it when you were seven years old? (If yes, probably a value.)
- Is it really exciting and you're a bit afraid of it? (If yes, probably a value. Keep it.)<sup>4</sup>

Think now about who you are and what you value. Try answering this question, with this qualification. List twenty answers here (and don't stop until you've written them all) that could complete this sentence:

I want my life and my work to be centered around things I truly value. Other than family, friends, and good health, my top twenty values are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_
13. \_\_\_\_\_
14. \_\_\_\_\_
15. \_\_\_\_\_
16. \_\_\_\_\_
17. \_\_\_\_\_
18. \_\_\_\_\_
19. \_\_\_\_\_
20. \_\_\_\_\_

Here's the point of this exercise and, overall, of starting this renewal journey by finding out who we are. "Personal values are important because they provide us with a road map for the kind of life we aspire to lead. The more our choices line up with our values, the better we generally feel about ourselves."<sup>5</sup>

Now, reread your list. That's *who* you are. But you still have to get down to that magic number of three. Not because the others don't matter, but because it's more realistic to make this journey a step at a time, so you need a sharper focus. You're not trying to replan your entire life here in this book. Just take a twist or turn today, to move you closer to your real goals.

Let's borrow the creative way to do this that Roz Savage herself suggested. Have you ever considered writing your own obituary? That's what you're going to do next, at least the first part of it. Often used as part of a visioning process, doing this can actually help to sharpen your focus on values and separate what's real . . . from what we've been told should matter.

Remember, as an anonymous blogger once commented, "No one is going to stand up at your funeral and say 'She had a really expensive couch and great shoes.'"<sup>6</sup>

What would you prefer they say? Before you start writing, you need to narrow down your list a bit. Here's how to discover those top three values from your list. (This could take some time, but stick with it; the insight it will help you capture will be pivotal to the rest of your process.)

*Reading through your list, put a #1 next to the value that means more to you than all the others. Rereading, put a #20 next to the one you could live without. (Remember, the sky's the limit in this exercise. Don't consider money or time or other realities; just go with what you truly feel.) Continue this process, making as many changes along the way as needed, until you've numbered them all.*

## Your Renewal Plan: Step One—Who?

Let's get started building your own, personal *Renewal Plan*. Complete the sentence below and then recopy your answers onto Lines #1, #2, and #3 in *Your Renewal Plan* in the back of this book.

→ \_\_\_\_\_

The three things I most deeply value are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

← \_\_\_\_\_

This is an important beginning. With those foundational values in place, further investigations both backward and forward are going to help design where you can go from here to make sure you are both honoring and implementing those values. Right now, it's time for that obituary. Just write the first paragraph or so that you would like to read, when the time comes. Make sure this paragraph somehow includes your most critical values.

*(Your name here) was dedicated to \_\_\_\_\_  
and made a significant contribution to \_\_\_\_\_  
by her/his work in \_\_\_\_\_.*

With the end in mind, let's go back to the beginning and then put this all together.

## **Life So Far . . .**

Leaving the conceptual foundation of values alone for just a while, some practical reviewing of your life thus far will help continue the process of sharpening your focus.

Think back as far as you can and describe three things you've always wanted to do. Remember, these are things you *wanted to do*, not what you *wanted to be*. (*No one is reading this but you, so be honest! You can say cowgirl or astronaut if you want. As a matter of fact, that will be important later on.*)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Do you see it? There should be a direct correlation between your newly identified values and what you've always wanted to *do*. Had you been accorded the opportunity to live in a perfect world, with plenty of time, money, and opportunity to chart your own course . . . ah, well. You're here now, and likely with a lot more intention and conviction than

before. So, as a Roman philosopher once said, remember that “luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.”<sup>37</sup> It’s never too late to turn those values and dreams into reality.

In actuality, it’s likely that you’ve already accomplished more than you realize or appreciate, albeit through channels other than what you expected. Take a look. What has your work life been like so far?

List the most recent ten jobs/positions you’ve held. If you haven’t yet had that many, just list as many as you can remember. Leave the line underneath each job blank—for now.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

---

Reviewing that list, on the line underneath each job you need to consider which of your twenty values you got to experience while there. In order to do that, consider what really energized you at each position. That's often how our values are *felt*. Ask yourself what work you found most satisfying, which jobs fit your personality best, or what environment made you feel the most motivated.<sup>8</sup>

Obviously, since you've chosen to read this book, even though you may have found partial matches to who you are and what you have done, there are still gaps to be filled in. You can do that, here and now.

## The Process

You've probably noticed by now that your life has taken some twists and turns along the way. All for good reason, no doubt. Whatever you feel at this point, don't be discouraged! To be honest, when we pause like this to think back over where we've been, the whole idea of career development has sort of a root canal feel to it. Even the words used to describe *professional development* make it seem more challenging than compelling.

We hear that we have to climb up ladders to be truly successful—and that sounds dangerous. And some people don't just climb, we're told, they *claw* their way to the top. Ouch. Then, once we get up there (some of us in our *recommended* suits and heels), more than half of us are taught to expect to crash into glass that we can't get through. The rest of us are working our fingers to the bone. Having fun yet?

Don't believe it. Or at least, if that's all been true for you, you can change that right now. If we take the time to look at our own career path thus far, it really hasn't been all that terrible, has it? While we didn't actually do anything wrong, we most likely followed our particular path hopefully, at best, and automatically, at worst. Not a bad start, but we can do better for ourselves, our organizations, and our lives.

Since you've decided it's time to take a look forward, then there's no better place to begin than by examining how you got to where you

are today. What you're likely to find are many intentional decisions that you're going to want to repeat. And with honest, open eyes, you'll probably also notice some Mulligans or choices you'd like to remake or, at the very least, not repeat. What this process can and should be is invigorating, uplifting, and encouraging—as far away from the root canal as we might have expected.

Remember, this is not (necessarily) an exercise that will lead you to a new job. That might not be at all what the new, renewed you discovers is the right move to make next. You might just end up realizing you are best off staying right where you are, but perhaps filling your day a little differently. Remember, “Growth isn't limited to movements over, up or down. With the right support, people can grow right where they're planted!”<sup>9</sup> Your goal should be to renew your commitment, your skills, your goals, and your future. Unfortunately, this isn't easy while we're busy working.

The woman we met in the introduction to this book, for example, probably stopped after realizing she could pay the bills and still get the kids on the bus on time. Worthy goals, both, but now that she's realized time won't wait for her to find more, she's going to go looking for a chance to matter. It's never too late.

You, too, have some clear ideas now and, hopefully, the enthusiasm to go with them to not only *look* ahead—but to *move* ahead with more purpose, clarity, and excitement. Why? Because those values you listed can help guide you to select, grow into, and develop a work life that matters—to you and to your employer—starting today. Everyone wins; organizations, those we impact, our families, and ourselves when reality finally gives way to intention.

## That Old Life Ladder

Now that you've spent some time looking back, consider more carefully the personal career ladder you have happened to use. Did it work like this? “If you wanted to reach the upper rungs, unless you wanted to crawl on the backs of those ahead of you, you would have to wait your turn until the rung above you became available. And, if your ladder had rungs missing, you would have to take precarious, giant steps upward, not knowing for sure if you would safely make it to the next one up.”<sup>10</sup>



While that may sound like the way we were told to expect professional fulfillment, it's not the only way, and certainly it's not the best—or the preferred! Still, if that's the path you've had to follow thus far . . . that's okay. Today is the first day of your *renewed* future. Let's examine some other options that will feel and work a whole lot better.

On our professional journey so far, most of us have tacked to cover,<sup>11</sup> as some less courageous sailors might do, by simply doing what others have done and what everyone expects of us. Authors Bennett and Miles explain that this might not be the best approach to take. "It's not always the best career strategy to follow the crowd. Sometimes, getting ahead requires the courage to break away from the pack."<sup>12</sup> And the same might be said for not *just* getting ahead and for being truly fulfilled in our work. Like captains in a sailboat race who don't tack but instead move courageously ahead, keeping to their own path, you might just find yourself "better off making career moves that head you in a different direction, where you can enjoy unique experience to . . . develop your talent and win in the future."<sup>13</sup>

## Ok, Forget The Ladder!

Take a look around—and ahead—from where you are now. Regardless of *how* you got there, you've got a lot of turns yet to take, no matter where you are in your career. Forget the ladder. Once you've taken the time to clarify what you really want to do—and why—your options should look a lot more like that rock wall or, better yet, like a white-washed, neighborly "lattice" (moving you) "across, up and down different positions"<sup>14</sup> until you feel focused, energized, and engaged in everything you do.

The next obvious question here is: why should you bother changing anything? Well, you made the lists when you answered the "values" questions. Consider now each and every day coming in your future—and how you want to reach and achieve them. Ask yourself, what's the best that can happen?

By matching what you rise to accomplish each day with your core values, you can actually be happy at work. Happy? Yes, the ultimate goal of your renewal will be happiness, which is what makes this entire exercise worthwhile. And, unlike pornography,<sup>15</sup> you don't have to *see*

happiness to know you've discovered it. Gretchen Rubin, creator of "The Happiness Project," suggests you will have found yourself when what you do strengthens your relationship with other people. When your work provides you with novelty and challenge. When your path has not cost you too much loss in other areas of your life. When your work allows you to *Be (insert your name here)* instead of denying the truth of who you really are.<sup>16</sup>

We need to start by identifying our values, because "implementing them energizes everything."<sup>17</sup> It's time to get to work.

## Try a New Focus

Experts tell us that the closer we get to our values, the more joy we feel. You may have felt it at first. Remember that very first day of that very first job that you really, really wanted? The trick, they tell us, is to find a place to work where that feeling lasts. Maybe there's even a bit of it left over for you now, but perhaps just not enough. Or maybe you feel that even though you've made the right moves on the lattice, right now you're just running out of gas.

The title of this section, "Try a New Focus," was chosen intentionally. It's meant to remind and entice you to consider what you still can do—to rechart your own course for the future. It's never too late! Read on.

In the coming chapters, you will continue to reexamine your current position in life—and in work, reconsider the footprint or contribution you want to make; recall and refocus on your dreams; refresh your reality; adjust your fit (which includes, of course, expanding your skills and options); recommit to tomorrow; reclaim your identity (not one thrust upon you by some dusty old job title); reinvent your brand, so as to sell yourself clearly; and, finally, celebrate your renewal.

You are moving forward, which is good, but you still don't know for sure when and where you'll arrive, which is even better. "Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out!"<sup>18</sup>

In the meantime, make sure you are keeping your reputation and

your good name polished, so when you get there . . . someone or something will be waiting.

## Stay Out of Your Way

Without even meaning to, and often without ever realizing it, we sometimes get in the way of our own future and trip over our own well-intentioned feet. Here are just a few suggestions, including some from Peter Economy, often called “The Leadership Guy,” on how to avoid those pitfalls as your renewal continues. We’ll think more about our day-to-day realities in future chapters, but throughout the entire process, we need to be sure that we’re meeting our current commitments and responsibilities, even while planning our tomorrow.

- Don’t burn bridges (you’ve heard this before, I’m sure). Just one unprofessional, disrespectful moment could ruin a career opportunity. Always treat others with respect and be professional—and stop the gossip chain—whether it is with your peers, the boss, clients, or customers. This applies to social media, too!
- Don’t stop learning and challenging yourself. If you fall behind the times in knowledge and technology, and stubbornly continue down the old-trusted-ways road, your skills will eventually become out of date and completely obsolete. (*Author’s note: I once met an employee, frustrated by a cut in her organization’s training budget, who told me she was through with professional development. She even planned to let her professional certification lapse—if someone else wasn’t going to pay for it anymore. That’ll show ‘em, huh?*)
- Don’t let your resume gather dust. So often, when we land that great job, the resume is the first thing to bite the dust in the back of our desk. Don’t build cobwebs—keep it handy and update it as new training, projects, and achievements come along (and do the same for your portfolio).

- Meet people. If you aren't networking and building a base of contacts, how do you expect anyone to know who you are?
- Give it your all. Every day. Or, as one of my favorite mentors always says . . . raise your hand! Show initiative at every opportunity and you'll find more of them coming your way.<sup>19</sup>

If it helps to embolden you on your renewal journey, realize you are not alone in this quest for a purposeful life. Consider these comments, collected over the years from anonymous employees who were probably feeling the same things you are thinking right now. Do you recognize yourself in one or more of them?

- Spending 40–60–80 hours somewhere each week . . . I want it to mean something. I want to feel like I'm moving forward somehow. If I can't grow here, I've gotta look elsewhere!<sup>20</sup>
- Challenge me. Stretch me. I'm not as worried about being promoted as I am about learning, growing, and seeing my talents used in new and different ways!<sup>21</sup>
- I'm happy at my current level. I don't ever want the headaches of being the boss. But I also don't want to stagnate where I am. I need to keep figuring out the next challenge, the next place I can make things happen.<sup>22</sup>

## Misery Has Nothing to Do with It

Don't ignore this book just because you don't want people to think less of you for reading it. You don't have to hate your current job, or even feel hopeless in your current position in order to want to grow. Remember, as these years go by, we're talking about our *lives*, not just our *work* being spent. Renewal can rejuvenate you in any situation, whether you stay or leave your current position. Sometimes renewal can just unblock a dam of apathy, and with new energy can come new direction. I've never met a boss who wouldn't appreciate that in a staff member.

Maggie Zhang suggests several explanations for finding oneself in the quicksand of uncertainty and frustration at work:

1. Maybe you picked a conservative career when you were young and just never switched. Honestly, how many people really, really know what they want to do for thirty years when they just got out of high school?
2. You feel like you're working for the wrong reasons. One of the most common of those reasons? You feel like you're just following the money.
3. You feel like you're underused and just not working (as your grade school teacher used to say) up to your real potential.
4. You just can't find meaning in what you do. It goes against our basic human nature to do something for eight hours *just* to get money.
5. You don't feel in control. And you just never know what's going to happen next.
6. You work too much. You are overwhelmed and that concept of work-life balance you keep hearing about seems as likely as moving to Mars.<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Scott Sheperd warns "it is critical that we not miss our lives as we move through them."<sup>24</sup> I bet I can get an Amen for that!

So, are you ready to renew your life and career? By taking the time to refocus, you can reenergize. With time to rethink, you can redesign your imprint. Whether the concepts you'll consider in this book point you toward a different path altogether or help you gain momentum where you are right now, at least you'll know you are working for the right reasons.

It isn't just the work you do that deserves this type of effort. You do, too.

*Two Final Exercises* (these aren't part of your *Renewal Plan*, they are just to keep you moving forward to the next chapter. . .).

List three good reasons to finish this book.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Finally, explain briefly why your career (and life) are worth renewing.

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Whatever reason you just gave, I agree! Your renewal has begun! Next, we'll look at *what* those values should be directing you to do.

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