

LAW 1

IT STARTS WITH A VISION FOR YOUR LIFE

“There is no use in trying,” said Alice; “one can’t believe impossible things.”

“I dare say you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

—Lewis Carroll

Bruce Irving has his reasons, even if they don’t always make sense to others.

You want examples? When Bruce was accepted both at Harvard and Williams, he chose the smaller liberal arts college in the Berkshires because they welcomed him with a handwritten note. Harvard sent a form letter. “That didn’t seem to bode well on the humanity front,” Bruce recalls. His impulse, then and now, though it would take time to fully flower: to shape what he did to match what mattered to him in life, rather than the other way around.

When he lost his job as executive producer of the venerable PBS series *This Old House* in 2006, everyone expected Bruce to get another TV gig. But when a certain home-design guru approached Bruce about producing her new show, he said, “Yuck.”

Bruce has always had an inner pilot guiding him through the fir-

mament of life, even before he was aware of it. He began to recognize how much he owed to this inner pilot's great steering when he was forty-four. That's when he came face to face with his true self "in a near-swoon of recognition, love, and gratitude."

Although Bruce had spent seventeen years producing, researching, writing, editing, shooting, and designing new offices for *This Old House*, his inner pilot banked the plane and headed in a different direction. Since then, he's carved an unexpected niche for himself as a renovation consultant. By saying "yuck" to the obvious choice and matching his career to the life he wanted to live, Bruce is now truly happy for the first time.



Bruce was born and raised in the leafy, bucolic suburb of Darien, Connecticut, where all was serene—except for the basement explosions and windows breaking.

"Good" Bruce was the boy with the paper route who mowed people's lawns, had the best grades, and became high school valedictorian. "Bad" Bruce ran with an unsavory crowd and built bombs in the basement from firecrackers and model-kit rockets. "I never had a burning career ambition in my life," says Bruce. "I wasn't focused on the future. I never hit upon any activity that struck me as the thing I must do."

For want of a better idea, Bruce majored in English at Williams, graduated in 1983, and applied to ad agencies in New York "because it seemed like a fun thing to do." The ad agencies didn't feel quite as festive; none of them responded.

Bruce did some writing and editing for a start-up photography magazine in New York—not because of any particular love of photography, but because he couldn't get a job at any other magazine. Then he temped. Then a career counselor from Williams called and asked if he'd be interested in a job in investment banking. He wasn't, really, but he applied anyway. He was, however, very interested in the young woman who interviewed him, and he followed her to Japan.

Two years later, the same woman enrolled at the Kennedy School of Government in Cambridge, and he followed her to Boston. He didn't

know anyone there, but the wheels were turning even before he arrived. “I think I’d like to be a filmmaker or maybe something in TV,” he thought. But he had no money to go to film school. So he ran through his mental Rolodex, looking for someone he knew who did that kind of work.

Five years earlier, during summer breaks from college, Bruce had worked at the Straight Wharf restaurant on Nantucket. The restaurant was like a second home to Bruce; the chef, Marian Morash, was his surrogate mother.

“Dear Marian,” wrote Bruce. “Do you remember me?”

She did.

Marian Morash was quite a chef. She was the star of *The Victory Garden*, a highly successful cooking show on Boston’s public television station. Marian’s husband, Russ Morash, was the first producer to see the potential in Julia Child and in cooking shows in general. He was known as the father of the “how-to” genre, and his latest hit was *This Old House*, “the granddaddy of home-improvement shows.”

Bruce became the producer—and, when Russ retired, the executive producer—of *This Old House*. He wrote the occasional column for *This Old House* magazine.

Perfect, no? Bruce had finally found a situation he enjoyed and in which he could stay for a while. Right?



“I’d been there for about a year or two, and I thought, this sucks,” says Bruce. He wasn’t passionate about the subject, he was having issues with a couple of his supervisors, and he was still working part-time in restaurants because his job on the show paid so poorly.

He briefly considered law school, but chose Debby instead. They married in 1993 and had two daughters, Emily and Jane. Bruce settled down at home and on the show, which he grew to love. “The next thing I knew, I’d been there for seventeen years.”

In 1997, Time Warner licensed the name of the show and broadened the concept, then bought it outright from WGBH in 2001. The pressure was on. “We had to make money. We had to start a new show. We had to do this, that, and the other thing. We had *This Old House*. We

started a new show, called *Ask This Old House*. We made specials. We started a line of house paint. There was an intense amount of pressure to turn the franchise into a profitable business.”

By now, Bruce was a walking compendium of home-renovation expertise. Who else was announcing that LED fixtures were “weak light for a silly price,” or that bamboo flooring wasn’t eco-friendly because it’s held together with glue and formaldehyde? Who knew more about microbeveling in manufactured flooring?

Despite this knowledge—plus an Emmy—Bruce was axed from the show just before Christmas 2005, a victim of his big executive producer salary and the weakened state of the parent company. He breathed a sigh of relief and said, “Thank you, Universe!” It was an involuntary opportunity to reshape his life. Luckily, he had a newly acquired vision ready to go.



A couple of months before Bruce’s career was forced to undergo a gut renovation, Debby had laid down the law. “You have to do something for yourself,” she’d told her husband. “I’ve tried to make you a happier person, but we’ve run out of tricks in the Irving house. I’m tired of walking around on eggshells. You’re a grumpy asshole.”

To transform himself, Bruce signed up for The Hoffman Process. Originated during the sixties, Hoffman is a weeklong program that uses psychoanalytic theory to help adults change their responses to their childhood dramas and family dynamics. Bruce heard about Hoffman “from an artist who I dismissed in my cynical way as ‘flaky,’” and then from a very cool, hip, and accomplished TV producer. “If it worked for these two guys,” he thought, “maybe there’s something to it.”

“It’s not a cult,” Bruce is quick to point out. “It’s a deep dive into yourself, how you behave, and who you really are.”

Hoffman was the subject of a three-year study by the University of California at Davis, which found statistically significant benefits of the program that went way beyond the temporary “halo” effect of fads. “It’s the most profound thing I’ve ever done in my life, without question,” says Bruce. “I came out completely blown open. I basically look at my life as Before Hoffman and After Hoffman.”

The Hoffman Process put Bruce in tune with his inner pilot: “A ‘real me’ who was helping me make choices that were good for me. I just didn’t know it, because I didn’t believe in him. He’d been inside me all along.”

Being downsized from Time Warner gave Bruce a chance to manifest his brand-new vision. “I knew more clearly than I’ve known anything that I had to do something else with my life. Time was a-wasting.”



“When you’re a proctologist,” Bruce says with characteristic bluntness, “people are always asking about the sore on their ass. People were always asking me, ‘I have this thing in my house.’ Once they knew I was the *This Old House* guy, I was constantly giving advice about products, design, who to work with, and how to approach the project.”

What he loved most, he realized, about working on the show was “putting together the teams and then carrying out the rescue of houses. There’s the architect, the builder, subcontractors, town officials, material suppliers, and homeowners. Everyone has a different agenda, and they don’t always align perfectly with the homeowner’s. What if I was the guy who made everybody play nicely together and had the homeowner’s back?”

Bruce knew the players and the products. He was in touch with his new vision for himself. So he turned his back on the obvious choice—the lucrative offer from the TV diva—and hung out his own shingle.

“Renovation Consultant,” it said.

Bruce is neither a contractor nor an architect. He’s coach, facilitator, hand-holder, and advocate. One client likened him to a wedding planner. *Newsweek* called him “The House Whisperer.” Bruce has pretty much invented the field, the same way he reinvented his life.

All that Hoffman training—recognizing both his vision for himself and the importance of sticking to it—came in handy when the housing market crashed. Wanting to remain light on his feet yet gain steady cash flow, Bruce took a temporary gig as a series producer on a new show, *This New House*. He still does consulting. He still writes a column, now for *Design New England* magazine. He’s free and clear of the corporate politics he always despised.

Bruce describes this latest twist as “the never-ending mix of fun and games I’m up to.” Sounds like a great vision for a life.

THE LESSON BEHIND THE LAW: WHAT YOU WANT IN LIFE COMES FIRST

Career reinvention starts with a vision for your life because careers and jobs are delivery devices for the kind of life you hope to lead. They are a conduit for becoming the kind of person you want to be, experiencing the things you want to experience, having the things you want to have. Happiness in your career is directly tied to how much your work brings richness to your world.

In order to be truly happy, *your career must serve your life*, not vice versa. We often forget that the whole point of working is to help create a life we love living. If you have young children at home who you want to spend time with and yet choose a science research career that requires being sealed off in the Antarctic for six months of the year, you have cooked up a recipe for discontent. Most of the misery felt by clients who come to The Reinvention Institute can be traced back to the conflict between the life they desire to live and the life their job actually delivers.

The first question most people ask themselves as they embark on a career reinvention is: *What do I want to do?* But in order to answer that question, you must start with the *why*.

“Because I’ve been laid off,” “Because I could lose my job at any moment,” “Because I hate my work”—any of these could well be true. But reasons that have their root in external sources do not illuminate what you hope to achieve in your life. They do not tell you what it is you *seek*.

You must think about the things you value in your life—apart from work. *Why am I doing this? What more do I want in my life? What do I hope to gain?* If you do not take time to ponder these questions at the beginning, in the end you will get a new job but you will not get what you *want*.

This requires being precise: The answer to the question “Why?”

can't just be "I want something better" or "I'm looking for something more interesting." It has to include the specific details of the lifestyle you hope to build. It must encompass all facets of your world: where you live, who surrounds you, what you enjoy. Work is a part of that vision, but it is *how* you work—the flow of your day, what you spend your time doing, the kind of environment you work in—that is your focus at this stage. Your goal is to have a clear image in mind of your desired life. *What* you do comes later; you can calculate backward from your image to discover the career options that will deliver it.

Crafting this picture of the life you dream of living is the first step to charting a path to your new career. Imagining its details, rhythms, and essence will inspire the passion that will fuel you throughout your reinvention. But before you rush off to put a down payment on that villa in Bora Bora you've always fantasized about, let me first explode a few myths.

Myths

The Greek gods were said to have created thunder to express their bad moods—but that's another myth for another day. The kind of myth we're talking about in terms of career reinvention is a belief system, a rule book drawn from old wives' tales, fears, overheard conversations, worst-case scenarios, and the mothballs and tumbleweed that occasionally float through your brain, such as: "When I get a new job, I'll be happy at last."

Myths are fundamental beliefs about the world around you that you develop or nurture lovingly or accept without question. They can be positive or negative ("When I have that, life will be great" or "People like me can't have that") and usually appear in the guise of self-evident truths ("After forty, it's all downhill"). Here are some of the most typical career reinvention myths I hear:

Without a degree, I don't stand a chance.

I'm over fifty—I'm too old.

I've been doing my job for so long, I'm stuck in this industry.

My life will be better when I change careers.

The things I hate about my current career don't exist in the new one.

You have to "know somebody" in order to get in.

All my problems will be solved when I switch careers.

Myths always come with a downside. Negative myths turn into self-fulfilling prophecies ("I'll never make it, so I might as well not try"). Positive myths add the weight of heavy expectations to your dreams ("I'll know I'll have arrived when I make a million dollars"). Even if you keep plugging away and reach your goal, myths can set you up for disappointment ("I thought I'd be happy. When will that kick in?").

Myths are blindfolds that keep you from being able to sort fact from fiction. If you expect a job to deliver all that you seek, you may not recognize patterns of thought and behavior within you that need to change. The result is that the same problem crops up, job after job, even though you thought a new career would be just the tonic for what ailed you.

I once had a consultation with a woman named Theresa who came to me because she felt unappreciated at work. She was a business development executive at a Web design firm; earlier in her career she'd worked in printing services.

"Why do you want to make a career switch?" I asked.

"I think vice presidents in other industries earn more money," she said.

Theresa had a nice salary but felt resentful because she thought she should be earning well over "six figures." There was just one catch: She refused to work more than forty hours per week. She arrived at 9 A.M. on the dot, and clocked out promptly at 4:59 P.M. each day. Weekends? Don't go there. Theresa's company was fine with this arrangement; still, she felt she wasn't being adequately compensated given her title.

"Would you be willing to work more hours at another firm?" I asked.

"I shouldn't have to," she replied. "I'm a vice president."

Theresa was under the illusion that salary rewards were tied to title, not effort. She also believed the fallacy that the higher your position in the company, the less you had to work. Theresa was unwilling to accept the truth behind the myth: If she wanted to earn the bigger paycheck, she'd have to be willing to trade off the evenings and weekends she so cherished. I checked in with her a year later and she was still feeling unappreciated at her company and seeking a new position. When myths cloud your vision, it's hard to see that what needs to change isn't always the job. Sometimes it's you.

By holding on to myths you can also get stuck in a holding pattern and miss seeing what you could be doing right now that would make your life better (the "I'll be happy when . . ." syndrome). If you find yourself saying "I'll be happy when . . ." ask yourself: What can I do to be happy *now*?

Fantasies

Fantasies are a close relative of myths; in fact, they're practically kissing cousins. What's wrong with a little fantasy, you ask? Isn't it all about hope and thinking big? Didn't you just tell me to picture my villa in Bora Bora?

Yes, I did. There are many practical and constructive uses for fantasy. Positive thinking and visualization, for example, are techniques you will use in career reinvention to help you stay the course. But the definition of "fantasy" includes both "visionary idea" and "a supposition based on no solid foundation." Visionary ideas have made the world a better place, and we admire the people who come up with them. Thank you, Thomas Edison. Thank you, Jonas Salk. But when you choose your career destiny from "a supposition based on no solid foundation," your dream lifestyle is built on quicksand.

When I worked in entertainment, a woman named Stacey cold-called me one day. She'd read an article in a magazine about the international deals I'd done for my company and was eager to have a job like mine "because it sounds good."

I asked her how much travel she had done for work. Well, she hadn't done any. How much experience did she have negotiating

complicated joint venture deals? None. Did she speak any foreign languages? *Nada*.

Stacey's vision of a life on the go was carved entirely from imagination. In other words, when she said my job "sounded good," she really had no idea what I did for a living. "You get to fly business class to Tokyo!" she said. True. But if Stacey wanted to clear up her fantasies, she should have followed up with specific questions: How long was I usually away? How much of that time was spent working? Did I enjoy reading through hundreds of pages of contracts? When was the last time I had seen my friends? How were my houseplants doing?

Basing important career decisions on fantasy interferes with your chances of making a reinvention stick. You may find yourself chasing the wrong rainbow, just as I did when I diligently worked ten years toward a Wall Street career that was not, ultimately, a good fit for me. Only late in the game did I realize that I had filled the gaps in my knowledge of Wall Street with my fantasy of "Wall Street." My day-dream of free international travel was true, but that fantasy hadn't taken into account the grinding hours or the fact that I didn't have a deep interest in arcane financial data. These turned out to be big negatives of the job that, for me, would outweigh the positives.

To Get You Have to Give

Career reinvention, by its very nature, offers the possibility of a more rewarding and fulfilling life. But as the saying goes, to whom much is given, much is also required. Put more simply: You don't get without giving.

To craft a pathway to your envisioned lifestyle, reinvention requires that you:

Be flexible. There will be times when you'll have to change your tactics, thinking, even your goal. Sticking to one plan—especially when you can see it's not working—defeats the whole purpose of reinvention. You have to evolve in response to the circumstances you encounter. When the bottom fell out of the housing market and his client pipeline slowed to a trickle, Bruce was willing to take a tempo-

rary contract position producing another television show. You must be willing to shift your ideas, plans, and strategies along the way.

Be honest with yourself. There's always the possibility that you're getting in your own way, and you have to be willing to face it. Maybe it's an ingrained attitude that's self-defeating, or a basic limitation that needs to be acknowledged: "Am I *really* a great multitasker?" "Do I truly prefer to run things? Or am I better at doing the job itself?"

One of my clients, Patty, was tired of her eight years in financial services marketing. "I hate that my job is all about servicing the sales department," she said. So she applied for a marketing job with Google.

"But Google is nothing if not an ad sales-driven company," I pointed out.

"It will be different there," she said.

Patty was not being honest with herself. If she hated helping sales where she worked at that point, she'd hate helping sales at the next company because she hates helping sales *period*. It's better to know the difficult truths about yourself, your likes and dislikes, before signing on for more of the same misery at a different firm. Have the courage to look within so that you can head toward what you want, not run from what you can't face.

Be willing to live outside your comfort zone. The reinvention process is not as bad as being thrust into a culture where they make you walk across hot coals before they feed you, but still, whenever there's change, there's going to be a certain level of discomfort. The more you practice tolerating it, the easier it gets.

You know this intuitively, but there's actually a scientific basis for it. When new information floods in—as it will on a daily basis as you reinvent yourself—it is stored in the prefrontal cortex, the brain's home for working memory. This is the brain's "holding area," where it stores new input to be compared with other information. This part of the brain is an energy hog; it can hold only so much data before it begins to get overwhelmed (think how you'd feel if someone sat you at the controls of the space shuttle and told you they'd give you all the instructions on how to get liftoff—and, oh yeah, you're going to be handling it yourself in an hour). The trick is to make these "new" things familiar—to get comfortable outside your comfort zone—so that they move from the prefrontal cortex to the basal ganglia, a less

energy-intensive part of the brain where the neural circuits of long-standing habits and routines are stored.

Be okay with your dream. The most important thing the first law of reinvention requires you to do is to give yourself permission to pursue what you want. Although you might think this happens automatically—“Of *course* it’s okay to go for what I want!”—the minute you start envisioning a new lifestyle, your subconscious will start throwing up a whole host of roadblocks.

HIDDEN CONFLICT THAT COULD STOP YOU: NEEDING A PERMISSION SLIP

When you were in grade school, you needed to ask permission for everything. “Can I have another cookie?” “Can I have my coloring book now?” “Can I go to the bathroom?” It was drilled into your head that the minute you had a desire, you needed to get authorization before you fulfilled it.

Even though you are now an adult, those childhood habits are stored so deeply in your basal ganglia, you don’t even realize they’re still there. But the minute you start crafting your imagined lifestyle, from the depths a question will arise: *Is it okay?*

You run the risk of sabotaging yourself until you sign a consent form that allows you to:

Want it: Reaching for a reinvention goal that far outstrips the accomplishments of your friends and family could make you feel guilty or disloyal, or as if you are leaving them behind. You’ll find yourself saying: “I can’t have all that.” “I’m asking for too much.” “I don’t need to have everything.” Not giving yourself permission to “want it” can cause you to lessen the scope of your goals and undermine your success before you even get started.

Have it: If your anxiety mounts the closer you get to turning your vision into actuality, you’re probably not giving yourself permission to “have it.” You’ll find yourself saying: “That seems like a lot.” “I’m not certain I can handle this.” “Am I sure this is the right thing?” You

pull back just when you're on the cusp of success because secretly you don't think you deserve it.

I had one client, Rachel, who almost torpedoed her reinvention over this issue. Rachel was a psychotherapist who dreamed of becoming the next Dr. Laura. She offered popular seminars on mother-daughter communication and was compiling her advice into a book. She diligently sent out informational packets to the press about her work. One day she got a call from a local TV morning show looking for an expert on the topic and asking her to make an appearance.

Rachel immediately left me a panicked voice mail, but I happened to be coaching other clients so it took me several hours to return her call. When I reached her, I asked if she'd called the show producers back.

"No, of course not! They want me to come on the show in three days."

I couldn't believe my ears . . . except, of course, I could. I knew Rachel was anxious in the face of finally having her dream. But morning-show producers are a time-sensitive bunch; they've got airtime that must be filled. If you don't get back to them right away, they'll find somebody else to take your spot.

My coaching call with Rachel had to set a record for speed because I had one thing to say: "Call them back immediately and say *yes*."

Be it: You've become ruler of the realm, but the crown on your head feels too heavy or big . . . as if it were meant for someone else. There is only one thing you say: "Me?" Not giving yourself permission to "be it" can cause you to undermine your efforts subconsciously so you won't have to choose between two dreaded options: feeling unworthy of the royal title, or embarking on a major overhaul of your fundamental beliefs about money and success.

Here are some permission slips that have just crossed your desk, and you need to sign them before you get to go on the reinvention field trip:

I, ____, give myself permission to change. The reinvention process is a road with occasional potholes and dead ends. Give yourself permission to take full control of the steering wheel and detour from your original plans.

I, ____, give myself permission NOT to be perfect. An insistence on getting it "right"—whether it means the "right" answer or doing it the

“right” way—can bog you down in details and make you lose sight of the big picture.

I, ____, give myself permission to please—or not please—others. Your loved ones will not necessarily meet your reinvention plans with a ticker-tape parade. Your spouse may not be happy when you quit your astrophysicist position at NASA to fulfill your life’s ambition of becoming a tango instructor. It’s just as bad if your spouse has been telling you for years to pursue tango and you refuse to quit NASA—despite having just won the World Tango championship—because you don’t want to give him or her the satisfaction of being right. One important thing to remember when signing this particular permission slip: It’s not a Get Out of Jail Free card on the Monopoly board of life. You still have to honor your commitments to those who depend on you or who are affected by your decisions.

When you sign these self-consent forms, be prepared for fallout. There are consequences to deciding to pursue your reinvention. You will need to stand strong in the face of disagreement from friends and family. You will have less time on your hands. You will face fear. But like Charlie’s golden ticket in the Wonka Bar, your permission slip will swing open the door to a glorious new world.

LIVING THE LAW: THE LIFESTYLE YOU WANT—AND THE CAREER TO DELIVER IT


At this juncture in the reinvention process, your only task is to come up with ideas. Let me say at the outset that reinvention doesn’t promise that you’ll reach an idyllic state of being. Instead, it’s about having a genuinely fulfilling life, with all the ups and downs, messiness, and trade-offs that being human entails. It means putting up with things you don’t like—like wild dogs and sand flies—to have the things you do like: a villa in Bora Bora. To have a life you love—for real—you must make choices.

Crafting a dream lifestyle is a matter of weighing personal priorities against tough decisions. Is your dream compatible with your life? How can you balance your important obligations with your passions? The trick is to find a workable intersection of career interests and

lifestyle; getting most of what you want in both arenas is a recipe for satisfaction.

To do that, follow this three-step process:

Uncover Your Myths and Fantasies

To clear up any illusions that you might be harboring, it's time to do a little myth-busting and fantasy cleanup. ¹

Ask yourself the following questions:


1. What problems do I think will be solved by my reinvention?
2. What things will I finally get that I've been waiting for?
3. What are the barriers I think will stop me from getting there?
4. What are the cool things I'm looking forward to in my new career?
5. What won't I have to deal with once I make this switch?

Make a list of your responses and keep them at hand. As you move through your reinvention, you will test your assumptions. Sometimes they may be based in fact (grounded in independently verifiable data; e.g., vice presidents often work evenings and weekends); if that's the case, then you know your expectations are on target for your goal. When they're not based in fact, check to see if there are some emotion-based "truths" (e.g., "I am not appreciated at work") that might be clouding your vision and giving rise to a few myths and fantasies that might be holding you back.

Visualize Your Ideal Life

You may have heard the saying: "If you can see it, you can be it." This is the principle to employ when taking this next step. You want to create a detailed picture in your mind of the kind of life you're shooting for.


¹Exercise on Page 217: Myth Busting and Fantasy Cleanup

The best way to start creating a life vision is by imagining a picture of your ideal day. ² You wake up in the morning—where are you? What does the room look like? Who's with you? Visualize all these details and make them real. You get up and get started with your day—what do you do? Do you have a leisurely breakfast with your family on a sunny patio, or go for a long run, or roll down to your home office to check out the latest headlines online? It's your day—start it the way that makes you happiest.

After that, you begin work. Don't panic here—you don't have to know exactly what you're doing! Just know that you begin work and decide what that looks like for you. Do you leave to go to an office filled with people, or head off to a quiet writing studio in your backyard, or go to a sunny loft and greet your small team? Is the environment intense and invigorating, relaxed and laid back, or creative and a bit crazy? What do you do for lunch—go to a new restaurant with your coworkers, read a book in the park, go for a quick bike ride?

Your ideal day should speak to your heart, excite you, make you thrilled and a little bit scared, and bring you a sense of fulfillment. If it doesn't, then dream bigger! Don't be afraid to stretch yourself and create a picture that seems almost scary in its possibility to make you happy. This is what the priorities and passions of your life look like.

Brainstorm Career Ideas

Now that you have designed your ideal lifestyle, it's time to come up with a list of careers that have the potential to deliver it. Get your creative juices flowing by asking yourself these six questions: ³

1. **When am I in flow?** Flow, as defined by psychologist and author Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, is an optimal state of mind that happens when you are totally absorbed in an activity, when time seems suspended and you feel a deep sense of satisfaction. What do you normally do that is so effortless and joyful that you could happily do it for hours? When Bruce sat down and thought

²Exercise on Page 219: Visualize Your Ideal Day

³Exercise on Page 222: Brainstorm Career Ideas

about what he loved about working on *This Old House*, he realized it had nothing to do with it being a TV show. The moments that were the most fun for him were in putting together the teams and rescuing the houses.

2. **What feels “easy”?** This is the talent you have that feels as natural as breathing. People probably call you all the time for . . . something. What is it? What problem do people always come to you to solve? When and why are you the “go-to” resource for family and friends? What do your friends always tell you you’re so good at? Once people found out that Bruce was the *This Old House* guy, they started asking him for recommendations on home improvement products, design, contractor resources, etc. He realized there might be something in that, even if it wasn’t the path people would have expected of him and even though he’d been offered another producing job on the design diva’s show.
3. **What seems “obvious”?** This is something that seems so abundantly clear to you that you wonder why others don’t see it or do it. It’s so obvious! Bruce wondered why no one acted as an advocate for the homeowner during a renovation. He thought, “There’s a constellation of people involved in renovation—the architect, the builder, subcontractors, town officials, material suppliers, and homeowners. Chances are that the homeowner has never done anything like this before. Also, everyone speaks a slightly different language with a slightly different accent. Frankly, they all have different agendas, and they don’t always align perfectly with the homeowner’s.”
4. **What are my inexhaustible interests?** These are the things that spark an unending sense of curiosity, or that you can never get enough of. In my first reinvention, after I left Wall Street, I didn’t know where on earth to look for my next career. I had been so bored with all that financial talk about basis points and derivatives. If only they would talk about what I was devouring in magazines! I love magazines. I had subscriptions to everything, and I could happily sit and leaf through them for hours.

I pored over magazines and newspapers because I had an endless fascination for pop culture. *That's when I realized I was a media junkie.* Here was a topic that would never bore me. Once I had identified this feeling within me, this love of pop culture, I could bring in my reasoning to help flesh out my choices.

5. **What do I gravitate toward in my current career?** You can be so desperate to leave a job that you forget how much of it does work for you. If you leave all that behind, you could be setting yourself up for more unhappiness—only instead of yearning for what you don't have, you'll miss what you left behind. Even if you hate your job, there are always a few parts to like. What are they? Bruce realized that he enjoys talking to people and working with them. He enjoys the psychology behind matching people's desires to their budgets and finding the right resources for making those desires come to fruition.
6. **What should exist in the world but doesn't—perhaps to buy or eat or do or read?** This is a great question for entrepreneurs in search of a market niche. Think of the Post-it. The bra. Those sun visors that hold two cans of beer, straws dangling, to wear to football games. These are examples of where there was a *need*, and someone came along and met it. That's how Bruce did it: He knew that when people renovated their homes, there were a thousand decisions to make that required the juggling of architects, contractors, and suppliers. He knew that in other industries, consultants were the “neutral party” brought in to assess the overall situation and make recommendations tied to the client's goals. Bruce combined the two.

Gather the data from your answers to these questions and compare them to the lifestyle you want to lead. Come up with a list of three or four possible careers that both match your interests and can provide the lifestyle you envision.

At this stage in your reinvention, your goal is to keep your options open. Don't be afraid to throw a few blue-sky ideas on your career list; as you move through the rest of the book, you'll learn how to evaluate

them. You've got a lot of work ahead of you to make reinvention happen, so right now pause for a moment and relish your dream.

The Takeaway: Careers and jobs are delivery devices for the kind of life you hope to lead. You begin by creating a picture of your desired lifestyle and making sure your reinvention plans are not infected with myths and fantasies.

Watch Out for . . . Forgetting to give yourself a permission slip to pursue a different and bigger life.

Putting the Law into Action: Make a list of three or four ideas that could deliver your desired lifestyle.

Something to Think About: What are the things I love most about my life right now?

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