

Working Identity, by Herminia Ibarra

Why this book. This book uses the topic of career change to address a larger issue.

We are almost always in transition. We might call it change or healing or growth, and it might be personal, professional or relational—or all three. When it comes to transition, and to our ever-shifting sense of things, it seems like we are either reflecting on what just happened, preparing for what we sense is just around the corner, or knowing that we are “in it” right now. As you read each chapter, my notes and questions might spur your thinking.

With each chapter, see what you decide to underline, look for themes and then do some writing about what you notice.

- I. Read the Preface and Chapter One, “Reinventing Yourself”, then write two short paragraphs:
The first summarizing what you decided to underline, and why, from this section.
And second, see if you can write a personal “signature statement” about how you are shifting in your own life. See if any core convictions are starting to emerge.
- II. Read Part 2: Identity in Transition
As you read about “test-and-learn” vs. “plan and implement”, did any of your assumptions feel challenged? In reading about Gary and Charlotte’s experiences, where do you see them getting stuck?
- III. Read Part 3: Between Identities
The word “trials” has two meanings in this chapter. Major transitions take time, may feel unproductive and like “living inside a hurricane.” Write about your own experience of navigating the in-between-time, the “neutral zone” of a major transition.
- IV. Read Part 4: Deep Change
“The difference between a job change and a career reinvention lies in a depth of personal transformation” that involves both the breadth and depth of your life. What is desirable? What is possible? Escaping a bad fit is easy, then the hard part starts. As you read the stories in this chapter, what challenges you?
- V. Read Part 5: Crafting Experiments
“By far the biggest mistake people make when trying to change careers is to delay taking the first step until they have settled on a destination.” This chapter is about “implementing the small probes and projects” that modify perceptions and create movement without premature commitment. What ideas do you find here that help you to craft experiments and then evaluate results?
- VI. Read Part 6: Shifting Connections
Amidst all the thinking and experimenting, this chapter reminds us, “We cannot regenerate ourselves in isolation. We develop in and through our relationships with others.” What new or renewed connections do you need to develop? Any relationships to leave behind? The old voices will almost always vote for stability. How can you be a secure base?
- VII. Read Part 7: Making Sense
“Fortune favors the prepared mind.” Louis Pasteur
Epiphanies, tipping points, crystallizing events, ah-ha moments, getting unstuck, putting it together . . . “The moment when it becomes clear that neither the passage of time nor minor changes in behavior will improve the situation.” Going forward, the “leap” looks easier, even compelling. How do you recognize, respect and respond to such a moment in your life? How will you revise and tell your story?
- VIII. Read Part 8: Becoming Yourself
“There is no substitute for constant exploration.”
Pay attention to the “steadily increasing advantage of learning, innovation and improvement.” Malcolm Gladwell in Outliers

Check out the illustration on p.162 and think of it as a life-long spiral.

“It is a messy trial-and-error process of *learning by doing* in which experience in the here and now (not in the distant past) helps to evolve our ideas about what is plausible—and desirable.” Underline as you read pages 167 to 171, and write a paragraph about how you could use these “unconventional strategies” with your next steps.

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