

PART ONE:

THE CASE FOR  
REINVENTION



## CHAPTER ONE

# THE DECISION TO REINVENT MYSELF

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*“Your journey has molded you for your greater good, and it was exactly what it needed to be. Don’t think you’ve lost time. There is no short-cutting to life. It took each and every situation you have encountered to bring you to the now. And now is right on time.”*

—ASHA TYSON,

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

When someone spits on your face, that’s a clear sign it’s time to reassess your life.

In 2005, I was the heaviest and most out of shape I ever was in my life. I was forty pounds overweight. Financially, I was held hostage by my total debt of \$150,000 when my salary that year was only \$45,000 per year. Every day of the week, I spent two to three hours in a car commuting to and from work. Most of my week was dedicated to working so I could

pay my bills. At work, my supervisor rarely paid attention to me, and most of the time, my existence seemed to annoy him.

Once when I made a mistake and asked for help to fix it, he yelled at me so loudly spit flew out of his mouth and onto my face. I was sent home for the day after that public scolding. I could not believe making a mistake and asking for help resulted in a humiliating punishment. At home, I was in a relationship that was no longer right for me, but I didn't have the courage to end it. After six years together, we had grown in different directions. Most evenings and weekends, I just sat on the couch, watching television and eating snacks. I didn't have any desire to go out socially or work out. Aside from watching TV, walking my dog was the most consistent activity I engaged in outside of work.

When I graduated from Penn State University, I envisioned a very different life. I imagined making new friends, playing pickup soccer after work, playing golf, working a job I loved, learning from an awesome supervisor, enjoying a little travel, and maybe even building a family.

It was clear after a year into my first job out of university, this was not the life I envisioned. When the opportunity opened for a new role in a new city, I applied because I was ready to leave the current situation. Something had to change, and perhaps working with new people and relocating to a new city would give me an opportunity to also start making massive changes in my life.

In the summer of 2005, I accepted an offer for a new role and moved to St. Louis, Missouri. Hopefully, there would be less

spit in my face in this new role. Fortunately, I worked for a manager, Mark, who became a dear friend, mentor, and like a second father to me—a dream come true after my most recent work experience. I suppose life just wanted me to make sure I appreciated this incredible human who became one of the guiding angels on my journey to reinvention.

Settled into this new city, it was time to do something about my health, finances, and relationship.

### **REINVENTING MY HEALTH**

In my first week in St. Louis, I resolved to do something about my poor physical fitness. At forty pounds overweight, I didn't feel good and was low on energy; it was time to join a gym. In order to make it to the office on time, I needed to start my workouts by 4:45 a.m., so I found a twenty-four-hour gym.

On my first visit, I didn't really know where to begin, so I started with the treadmill. I walked, jogged, and ran. After a couple of weeks, I added stretching to the routine. Once I got accustomed to that, I added time on the stair master and then the elliptical machine. Every week I pushed myself to train just a little harder. For months this was all I did, which helped me get my weight down and gave me significantly more energy throughout the day.

Along the way, I encountered many limiting beliefs and negative thoughts. At times, I wanted to skip sessions because I convinced myself I earned a break after a short workout streak. Other times, I wanted to give myself permission to

go easy on the workout and take credit for simply showing up to the gym. That might have been okay in the first few weeks while I built the habit. However, that kind of thinking didn't serve me once I was months into the journey. At times, I distinctly recall I felt exhausted when I tried to push through a set of bench presses and wanted to convince myself I should reduce the weight. For some reason, I wanted to resist the possibility I could be fit. My mindset and beliefs were not yet ready to become a stronger version of me.

To solve this, I temporarily assumed roles and imitated characters I looked up to so I could be inspired to persevere through the tough workouts.

#### **ASSUMING NEW ROLES AND IDENTITIES THAT SERVE YOU**

Since I was a teenager, I have been obsessed with the *Rocky* movie franchise—a series of six movies that started in 1976 about a debt collector for a loan shark who boxes part-time and has dreams of becoming a professional fighter (Avildsen, 1976). In the first movie, Rocky makes his dream come true and reinvents himself into a full-time professional boxer. In the subsequent films, we get to see Rocky Balboa's journey to reinvention with all of its ups and downs.

Some of the most famous scenes in each of his movies are of him training for the big fights. You get to see parts of his training regimen and his struggle through increasingly difficult workouts. All of that effort results in a stronger and improved version of himself ready for the big fight. In my mind, if it worked for Rocky, it could work for me!

When the limiting beliefs and negative voices started to creep into my workouts, I assumed Rocky's character and that silenced the negative thoughts. Channeling Rocky into my workouts gave me newfound mental strength to persevere because that's what his character would have done. These movies inspired me to reinvent my health and push through the challenges.

Basketball great, Kobe Bryant, also leveraged this strategy. In a fireside chat at a conference, he told the moderator that he tapped into Russell Crowe's character in the movie *Gladiator*. "For me it was the equivalent of Maximus Decimus Meridius picking up the dirt, smelling the dirt. It's go time. So that was my mental switch, just like an actor getting ready for a film. You gotta put yourself in that cage. When you're in that cage you are that character... when I'm in that cage, bro, don't talk to me, don't touch me, leave me alone." (Motiversity, 2019)

My health was in a much better place after a year, and by then, exercise was an important part of my life. I also joined a local soccer team and began to play regularly. The original vision for my life started to come true.

Several years later, when I was going through a divorce, another character came to the rescue. That time I channeled Mark Wahlberg's character, Vince Papale, from the 2006 movie *Invincible* to combat the negative feelings. In the film, Vince was a teacher who struggled to find steady work and whose wife left him. With seemingly nothing to lose, he decides to try out for an NFL team, the Philadelphia Eagles, who were hosting open tryouts (Core, 2006). The movie is

about his journey to reinvention going from recently divorced and unemployed to a professional football player.

In one scene, Vince comes home to find his wife left him and took everything, including the furniture. A couple of days later, he walks back into an empty apartment, sees there's nothing for him there, and leaves to go for a long run. When he returns, again he realizes there's nothing for him there. He turns around and goes for another long run.

When you go through a divorce, a major part of your life just disappears. In that part of your life, there's a void or an emptiness. No one is waiting for you. Going home to no one, I decided to go for a run. When I returned home, there was still no one there, so I decided to run again. I didn't really know what else to do to begin getting over the pain, so I kept exercising because it worked for Vince. I started going to the gym twice a day.

Channeling my inner Vince Papale helped me get out of my own head and follow a path that worked for someone in a similar situation. Assuming new roles and characters can help you zoom out of your limiting beliefs and negative mindset. Once you're zoomed out, you can reenter your situation with more clarity and strength.

To help me fully process the divorce, I made the decision to go see a counselor. My role at the university offered an employee assistance program, which included six sessions with a counselor, therapist, or psychologist. I made full use of that benefit and even paid for a few extra sessions.



My counselor, Maryanne, helped me address the part of my health and well-being that was not addressed by my workouts at the gym. I was in the final semester of two graduate degree programs when I set up my first appointment with Maryanne. I was two months from graduating. However, I fell significantly behind because of the divorce. I thought about delaying graduation so I could try again the following semester. However, I wanted to get to the finish line more than anything else.

My sessions with Maryanne once a week were critical to my comeback. Between my gym sessions and her mental health workouts, I built the strength I needed to bounce back in my graduate degree programs. Maryanne met me on my reinvention journey at a time when I needed her the most, and she taught me the importance of mental well-being.

Assuming new roles and working with mental health professionals can play an important role in strengthening your mind for the difficult moments, including how to navigate the financial obstacles to reinvention.

### **REINVENTING MY FINANCIAL LIFE**

Extra weight wasn't the only thing I carried when I moved to St. Louis in 2005. My debt at the time was close to \$150,000. They call it net worth when you *have* \$150K. I still don't know what they call it when you *owe* \$150K. It was difficult to make a significant impact on my debt with a salary of only \$45,000 per year, so I decided to get a part-time job parking cars for tips.

I found a job post for valet parking attendants on Craigslist. After a phone interview and a background check, I was assigned to a Greek restaurant in St. Louis. The restaurant was thirty minutes from the office, and I needed to get changed into my valet uniform—black pants, white button-down shirt, bow tie, and red jacket—before I arrived at the restaurant.

My valet shifts were on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings. Thursdays and Fridays were the hardest because I'd have to leave for the restaurant right from the office, which made my only break the drive to the restaurant. Getting changed at the office was tricky because I didn't want to be seen in my valet uniform by my coworkers. My manager Mark was the only one who knew I had a part-time job, and he was supportive. However, it wasn't clear if others would feel the same, and I worried they might question my commitment to the job.

Despite my efforts to keep it a secret, it wasn't long before comments were made by my coworkers when they'd notice me leave the office ten or fifteen minutes before 5 p.m. on Thursdays and Fridays.

*“Wrapping up early today, huh?”*

*“Kicking off the weekend early this week?”*

*“Off to happy hour already?”*

These are some of the comments I'd hear from people while attempting to leave the office quietly. They weren't totally wrong. I was on my way to happy hour. It just wasn't mine!

Other comments suggested I didn't have enough work to do or that I was lucky to have it easier and finish up my workday earlier. This pissed me off because my workday was nowhere near done. I just bit my tongue. I wasn't doing this to prove anything to them. This was for my financial reinvention, and in all fairness, they didn't know my situation.

Most people won't know what you're going through at any given time. Give people the benefit of the doubt in these situations. You are the only one who stands to lose by feeling angry or upset, and it won't serve your reinvention.

For two years, I worked seventeen hours a day on Thursdays and Fridays. Fridays were the toughest because I only slept five hours since I worked until one in the morning the night before. Saturdays were relatively easier since I had the daytime to myself. Regardless, those years were difficult because I pushed my mind and body to new limits and risked getting into an accident driving home after a Friday shift on such little sleep.

### **REINVENTION ALSO MEANS LIVING BY YOUR VALUES**

On the journey to reinvention, you'll meet incredible people who teach you lessons you'll never forget. One valet customer taught me no matter how badly we want something or how difficult the struggle, progress at the expense of our values and integrity is not the way to reinvent ourselves.

One Friday night, I got into an accident. Fortunately, it wasn't on a highway late at night. Unfortunately, it was with a customer's car in the parking lot of the Greek restaurant. I accidentally backed into a lamppost. I estimated it would cost me

over a thousand dollars to fix it, which was approximately three weekends worth of tips. I thought about not saying anything. Legally, if he exited the lot without noticing, it was no longer our responsibility. However, I just couldn't do that. It was my mistake and even though he wouldn't even see it until he got home, I resolved to tell him.

I wondered how that exchange would go and what I would say or offer in order to right this wrong. Of course, car after car left and his was still there until it was the last car. He came out in a pretty good mood, and I already had his car pulled up. Before he got in, I told him I needed to show him something. I walked him over to the back of the car and showed him the scratches and dents. He stared at it for a while in silence. This was killing me.

I finally said, "I'm really sorry about this. I'll take care of whatever it costs to have this fixed. All I ask is that you please not mention this to the restaurant."

Then the strangest thing happened. He put his hand on my back and said, "You're a good man. You could have easily gotten away with saying nothing about this, but you chose to do the right thing."

At this point, I felt better about losing out on a month of tips to pay to get his car fixed. Then he pulled out money from his pocket and proceeded to tip me. I said, "I can't take this. I hit your car. I'll pay to fix it."

He insisted I take the tip. After I accepted it, he said, "This is to remind you that honesty is really the best policy. I want

you to remember this moment. And don't worry about the car, I'll take care of it. My wife's been bugging me to get a new car anyway, so you probably just did her a favor."

I must have misunderstood. Was I off the hook? It turned out I was. He asked me for my name and called my buddy who was parking cars with me to come over too. He mentioned he owned a restaurant in town and invited us to go and have dinner on him. I really couldn't believe what was happening. Did I just get a tip and dinner in exchange for hitting a car? It turns out I had. I never forgot that moment and the lesson.

What are your values? What does integrity mean to you? Never compromise on these in pursuit of reinvention. Doing so places the emphasis on the destination when you'll spend most of your time on the journey.

### **TEST YOUR IDEAS**

In 2007, I wanted to find another way to make the same amount of money as parking cars. Two years of operating on little sleep were starting to take their toll on me. I had an idea to tutor math. I knew how much I needed to make in order to get close to or match what I was making on average in tips for parking cars. I arrived at an hourly rate of thirty-five dollars. If I could book ten to twelve hours a week of tutoring then I could quit parking cars. I posted some flyers at universities in the area. A few days later, someone got back to me—Patricio.

Patricio was a student at Washington University in St. Louis. He needed help with his course on game theory. He asked if I

could help, and I said, “Yes, of course!” Problem was, I never took a course in game theory. My intention was to work with students who needed help with more basic math. However, this person called, and he was willing to pay thirty-five dollars an hour. I asked him what textbook he was using, and I found a used older edition for thirty dollars online. I figured if I stayed ahead of him, maybe this could work.

I read up on game theory, followed his syllabus, and focused extra hard on the topics he wanted help with. For every one hour of tutoring, I spent three hours preparing. I was still parking cars those days, so my spare time was limited. Long story short, I was able to help him get through that course. The problem was I didn’t think it was sustainable to have to prep so much for a few paid hours per week. Once I finished up with Patricio, I didn’t look for any more tutoring gigs and continued parking cars.

Little did I know that this small experiment with tutoring set up another opportunity later that year. In the summer of 2007, I paid off my last credit card, and I could now stop parking cars. I only had my student loans remaining. What a great feeling!

A couple of months after I quit my part-time job, I thought about tutoring again. Just because it didn’t work out with Patricio didn’t mean it was a bad idea. I applied for a part-time job at a local learning center teaching math. It didn’t pay as much as I made in tips from parking cars. However, I didn’t need as much extra income since I had paid off my credit cards. This part-time job was significantly easier on me since it was five minutes away from my apartment, and I

didn't have to leave the office early to get there. At this stage, this was the perfect part-time job.

### **DEVELOPING A NEW PASSION**

It wasn't long before the extra eight hours at the learning center felt like the best hours of my week! Since I didn't have any formal training in teaching or math, I relied on my high school and university math experience. However, what I loved most about the job was the chance to help these young people break through limiting beliefs and unleash their confidence in math. I discovered what stood in their way more than any misunderstandings in math was a limiting belief they could not be good at the subject. I spent most of my time breaking through their limiting beliefs because then they would often be able to handle the math without my help. I absolutely loved this job! If only they had full-time positions for the same salary I was making, I would have switched in a minute.

That Christmas holiday I went back to New Jersey to celebrate with my family for a couple of weeks. I told them all about my new part-time job. I couldn't stop talking about the learning center and all of the students I helped. I went on and on about everything I was learning and that I was unleashing a part of me I didn't even know was there. I was challenged, happy, and fulfilled in those eight hours per week.

The strange thing was that my day job was pretty awesome too, just in a different way. Around the same time, I was promoted to national account manager for the Anheuser-Busch

account and traveled all around the country to places like New Orleans, Las Vegas, San Diego, Miami, Chicago, Atlanta, and many other cities. Everywhere we went with Anheuser-Busch, you could count on an epic party.

But even with all that excitement in my day job, something was different about teaching math. Helping students break through and do something they did not believe they could do produced an incredible feeling! It's hard to describe what it felt like to stretch my skills in ways I didn't even know I could and to do so in service of helping someone in such a profound way. This job was becoming my passion.

My holiday visit was coming to an end, and it was time to head to the airport for my flight back to St. Louis just after the new year. My parents drove me to the airport, and on the ride, they noticed I was uncharacteristically quiet. Since I was a child, they knew that if I wasn't talking, it was either because I was sick or something was on my mind.

They asked, "What's wrong?"

I said, "I don't want to go back to St. Louis. I mean, I don't want to go back to my day job. It's fun, but I really love what I'm doing at the learning center. A lot!"

While I could be good, even very good at my day job, I believed I could be outstanding at working with students. I didn't know if I wanted to teach math or help all people break through limiting beliefs to do something they really wanted to do. Whatever it was, I knew it wasn't what I was doing at my day job.



That was the moment I realized it was time to reinvent my career. However, not everyone arrives at the doorstep of reinvention voluntarily.

### **FROM WALL STREET BROKER TO ASSEMBLY LINE WORKER**

In the 1999 movie, *Any Given Sunday*, Al Pacino plays an old football coach struggling to bring a team back from decline (Stone, 1999). In a scene near the end of the movie, ahead of their most important game of the season, he gives the team a pregame speech for the ages.

*“We’re in hell right now, gentlemen. Believe me. And, we can stay here, get the shit kicked out of us, or we can fight our way back into the light. We can climb outta hell... one inch at a time.*

*The inches we need are everywhere around us. They’re in every break of the game, every minute, every second.*

*And I know, if I’m gonna have any life anymore it’s because I’m still willing to fight and die for that inch because that’s what living is, the six inches in front of your face.”*

Sometimes life forces you onto the doorstep of reinvention when you least expect it and leaves you with seemingly nothing to grab onto. Rob, a husband and father of two, was a successful financial broker leading up to the Great Recession of 2008. He worked for a financial firm and was successfully helping his clients make a lot of money. Then, everything changed in 2008. Overnight, the world changed and banks we never thought could fail, all of a sudden went out of business.

The markets dropped to record lows, and people on Wall Street were laid off in record numbers. Rob was one of them, and he was officially in hell. If he was going to come back from this, he needed to “climb outta hell.”

After a few months of despair, Rob accepted he had to find a way out of this. With savings getting low, he realized he needed to do something to earn income. He didn't have many options due to the record layoffs during the Great Recession. He decided any job would do and took a job as a lawn care specialist. This was hardly the type of work a former Wall Street broker would expect to do. However, it was the first inch of a long journey. He had two kids to support, and they were his priority. After several months there, he reached for another inch and found a new job as an assembly line worker at a local factory. He was slowly clawing his way back from hell.

Imagine for a moment being his coworker on that assembly line and finding out the new guy was a former Wall Street broker. Life is interesting. Isn't it? Rob continued to claw and fight every day to do great work. Over the course of several years, Rob earned many promotions, always doing excellent work and showing he could handle more responsibility. After a long journey, he finally made it out of his own hell, and he became a vice president of a division for the company.

Rob didn't plan for or intend to reinvent himself. He was happy in his career on Wall Street. However, difficult moments happen, and what we do with them matters most. The decision to claw and fight our way back is ours to make, and that's a great reason to reinvent yourself.

## **WHY REINVENT YOURSELF?**

When I realized I was unhappy with my body and wanted to have more energy and strength, it was time to reinvent my health.

When I summed up all of my debt and arrived at a number close to \$150K, it was time to reinvent my finances.

When I finally accepted I was in a relationship that was no longer right for me, it was time to reinvent my personal life.

When I discovered my mental health was not strong enough for what I was going through, it was time to reinvent the way I took care of my mind.

When my job, which was a dream in many ways for a person my age, was no longer fulfilling me as much as a part-time job, it was time to reinvent my career.

When I was blindsided by a layoff during the worst moment in the COVID-19 pandemic, it was time to reinvent my career again.

When COVID-19 significantly complicated and delayed the immigration process for my wife to move to the US so we could finally live together, I knew it was time to reinvent my work and where I lived in order to be with her.

Everything I have done to reinvent myself was about becoming more closely aligned with who I really am and what mattered most to me. Every time I found myself out of alignment in any area of my life, it was time for reinvention.

Reinvention has nothing to do with becoming someone new and everything to do with becoming who you really are and engineering the life you want.

When you fall out of alignment in life, as you should periodically since you are always growing and evolving, reinvention can help you get back into alignment. You can reinvent different areas of your life so they are in alignment with the person you are today and the person you want to become tomorrow.

So why reinvent yourself?

More simply put, because there's an area in your life that is not aligned with your current values, passions, or purpose. Because life is not on your terms. Your schedule, your income, and your time are not on your terms. Because what matters most to you cannot be a priority in your current situation. This is why you reinvent yourself.