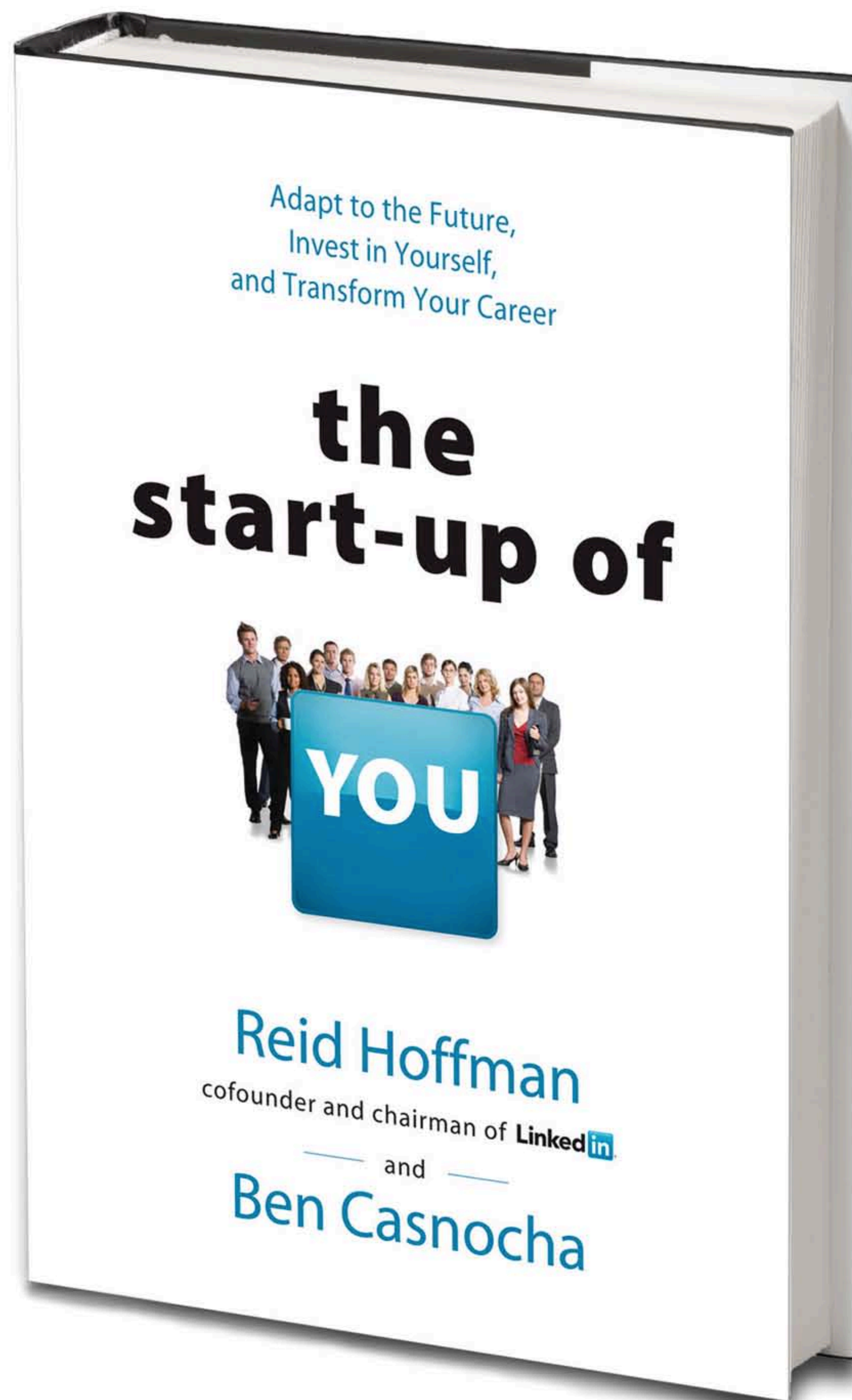
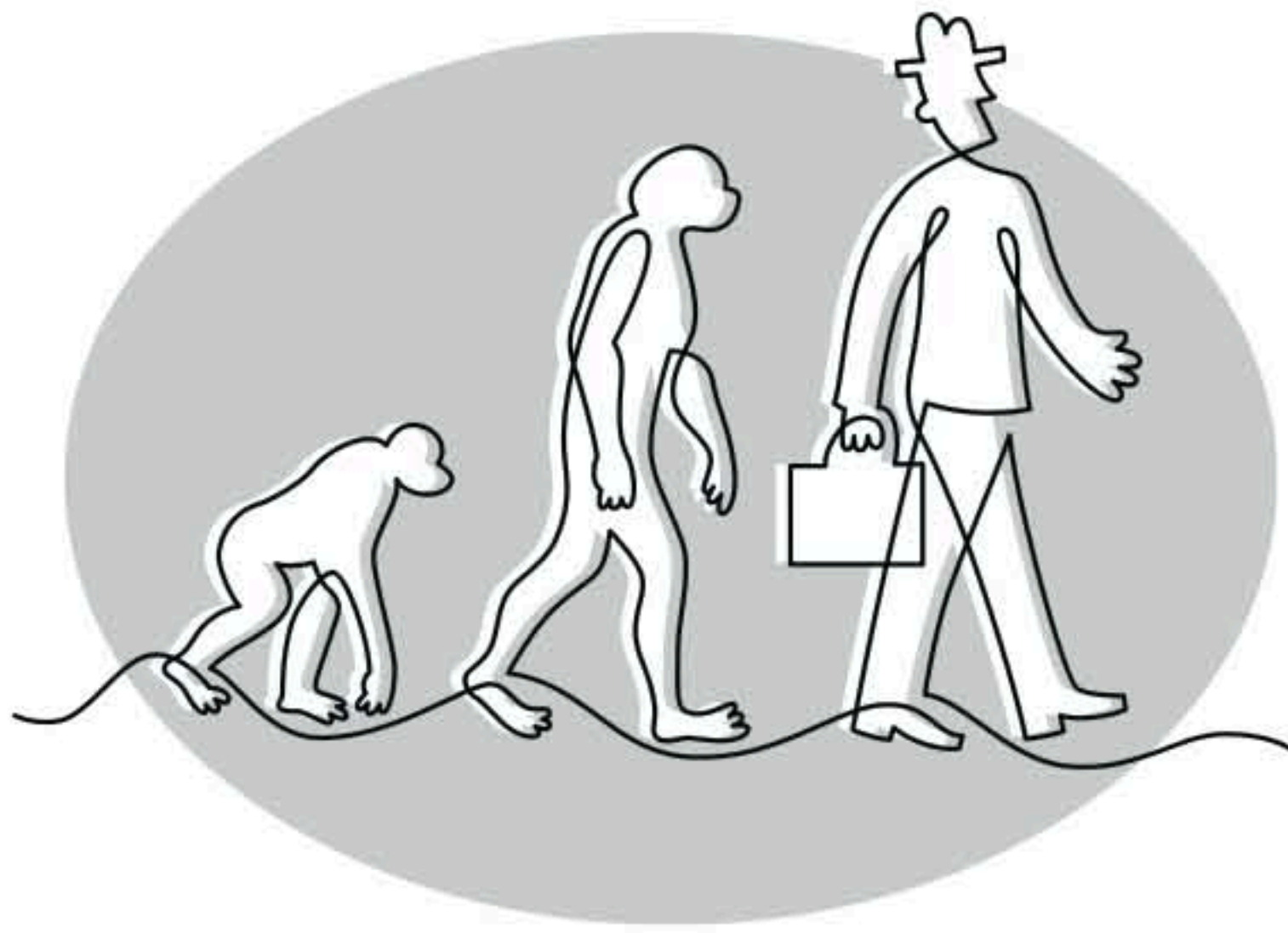


executive summary of the start-up of **YOU**



Reid Hoffman and Ben Casnocha

Chapter 1: All Humans Are Entrepreneurs



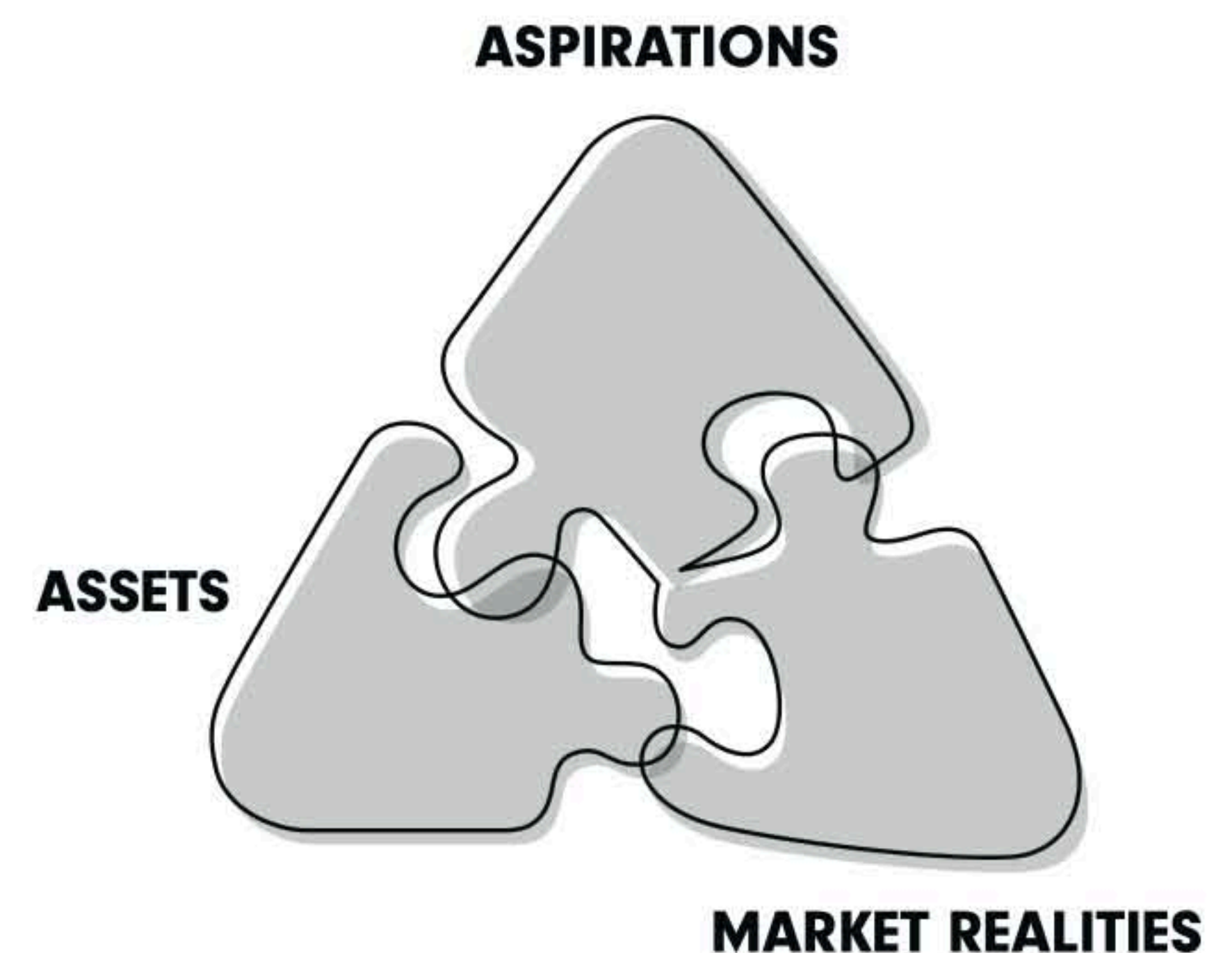
To adapt to the challenges of professional life today, we need to rediscover our entrepreneurial instincts and use them to forge new sorts of careers. Whether you're a lawyer or doctor or teacher or engineer or even a business owner, today you need to also think of yourself as an entrepreneur at the helm of at least one living, growing start-up venture: your career.

Why? The old career escalator is jammed. Age-old assumptions about work have come undone. There are new rules, and you need to know them--or else you may be on track to irrelevance.

The solution has two parts. First, a mindset of Permanent Beta: you must think of yourself as a work-in-progress and, therefore, you must invest in yourself every single day. Second, an entrepreneurial, adaptive skill set taken from the very best of Silicon Valley. It's these skills that we explain in the chapters ahead.

Chapter 2: Develop a Competitive Advantage

Differentiate or die. To beat the competition, companies develop clear reasons why a customer should pick them over other the alternatives. Zappos massively differentiated itself from other e-commerce companies by offering free shipping both ways and 24/7 customer service via a locally staffed 1-800 number.



Similarly, in a world where "a million people can do your job," chart a career path that sets you apart from other professionals. You don't need to be better than all professionals. You just need to be better in a local, professional niche.

Three dynamic, changing puzzle pieces comprise your position in the market and, when paired with a plan, determine the course you should head in:

1. **Assets:** What you have going for you now. Your soft assets (like knowledge, skills, connections) and hard assets (like cash in the bank).
2. **Aspirations & Values:** Where you might like to go in the future.
3. **Market Realities:** What people will actually pay you for.

One without the others doesn't work. Skills that can't earn money won't get you very far; following your bliss but not being very good at your bliss won't be too blissful after long; and being a slave to the market regardless of your likes and passions isn't sustainable over the long-run.

One way to upgrade your competitive position is by upgrading your assets—i.e., investing in yourself. You can also become more competitive by changing the environment you play in. Some American basketball players not good enough to play in the NBA play successfully in Europe—their skills don't change, but the market does. Picking a market niche where you're better than the competition is key to entrepreneurial strategy.

Chapter 3: Plan To Adapt

Popular career planning advice says you should decide where you want to be in 10 years and then develop a plan for getting there. Popular career planning advice says you should find your passion and then pursue it. These philosophies have serious strengths, but also huge drawbacks.

It presumes a static world. In fact, you change, the competition changes, and the world changes. It presumes that fixed, accurate self-knowledge can be easily attained through introspection. In fact, your identity is not found through introspection but rather emerges through experimentation.

Entrepreneurial career planning and adapting is about being flexibly persistent: always ready to adapt, but also persistent in driving towards set goals. Flickr and PayPal are two companies that adapted significantly, and Sheryl Sandberg's adaptive career are examples of flexible persistence.

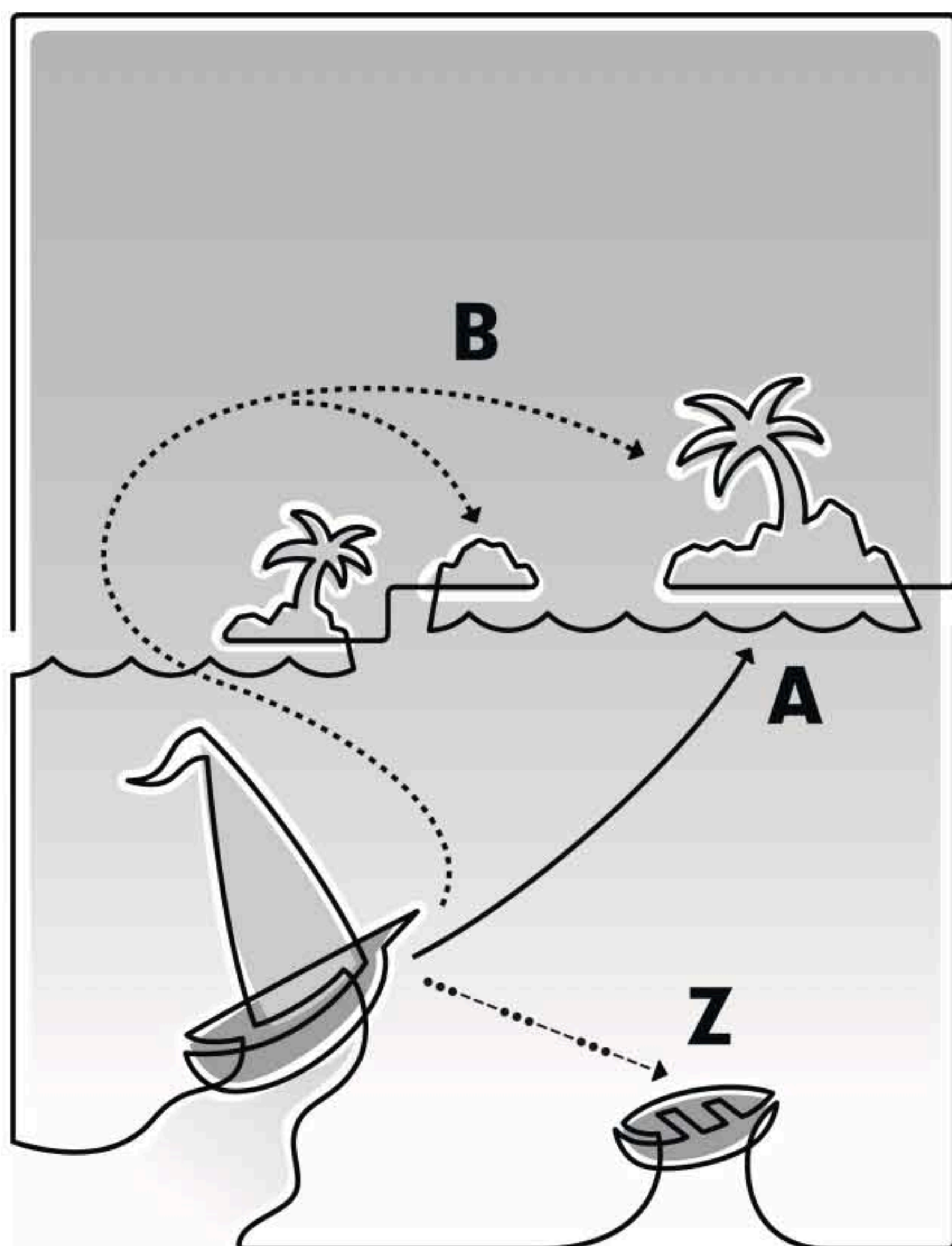
Make explicit the assumptions and hypotheses in your plan. You'll never have complete certainty; identify areas of incomplete knowledge about yourself or your industry and make plans that will help you fill those gaps.

Prioritize learning. Just as start-ups in the early days prioritize learning over profitability, so should you prioritize learning (soft assets) over cash salary (hard assets) for the majority of your career. In the long run, you'll likely lead a more meaningful life, as well as make more money.

Learn by doing. Actions, not plans will generate the lessons that help you adapt to the next phase of your journey.

Think two steps ahead. What next move will maximize the quantity and quality of follow-on opportunities?

Then craft an experimental Plan A, an alternative Plan B, and an unchanging, certain Plan Z.



Plan A: What you're doing now. Your current implementation of your competitive advantage.

Plan B: You pivot to B when your plan isn't working or when you discover a better way toward your goal.

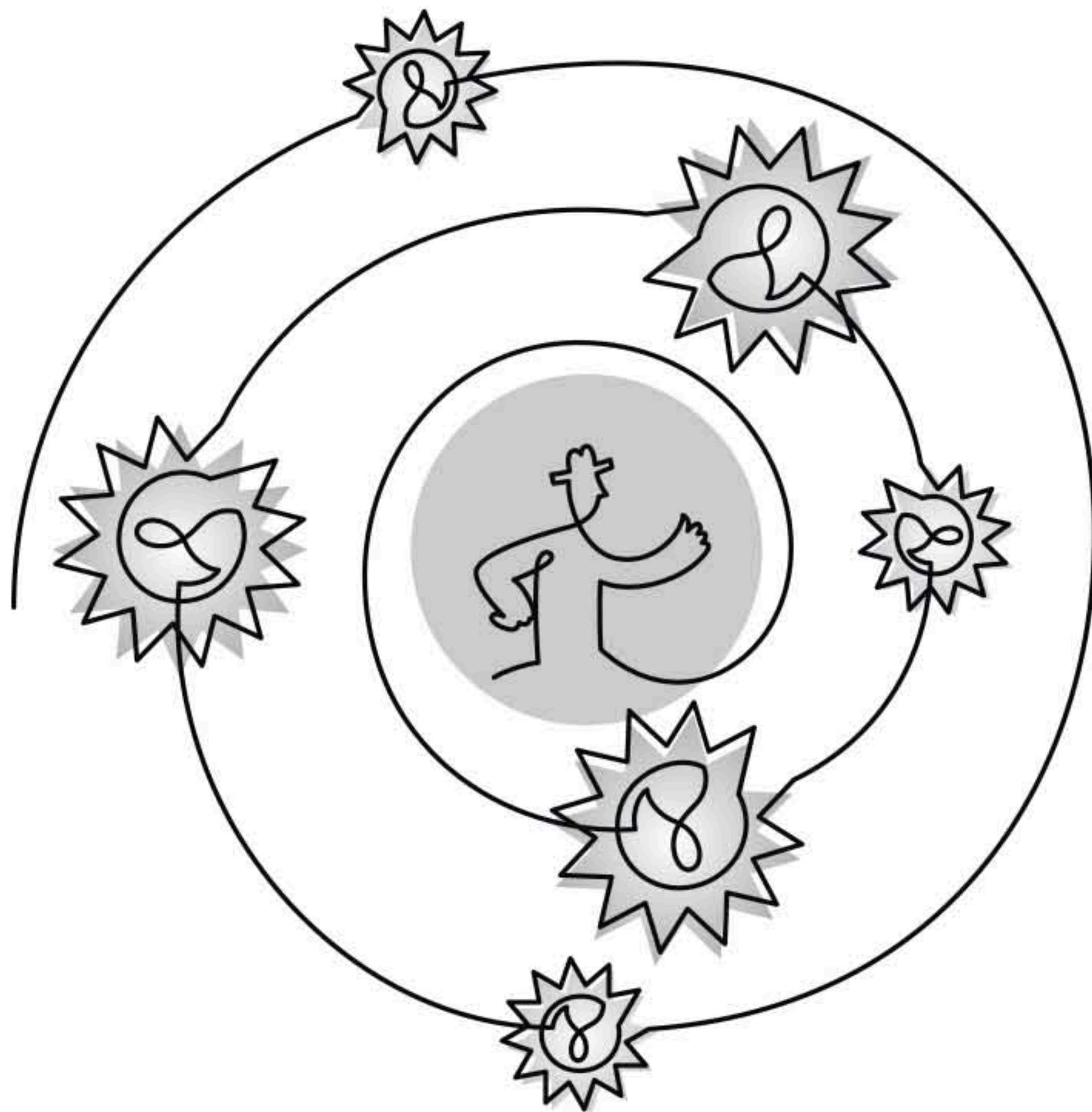
Plan Z: You shift to Z if something goes seriously wrong. It's the lifeboat you can jump in if your plan fails and you need to re-load before getting back in the game.

Chapter 4: It Takes A Network

Relationships matter to your career no matter the organization or your level of seniority because, ultimately, every job boils down to interacting with people. People control resources, opportunities, information, and the like. And the people you spend time with shape the person you are today and the person you aspire to be tomorrow. Think of it as **I^{We}**: An individual's power is raised exponentially with the help of a team (a network).

There are people you know in a personal context. There are people you know in a professional context. Generally, you keep the two lives separate for reasons of both etiquette and potential conflict of loyalties. However, sometimes you're personal friends with a professional colleague; in these instances, the context in which you engage the person shapes the right approach.

We wrote about two types of professional relationships:



Allies. Allies are people you consult regularly for advice. You trust their judgment. Second, you proactively collaborate on opportunities together. You keep your antenna especially attuned to an ally's interests, and when it makes sense to pursue something jointly, you do so. Third, you talk up an ally to other friends. You promote his or her brand. When an ally comes into conflict, you defend him, and stand up for his reputation. And he does the same for you when times get tough.

Weaker ties and acquaintances. While not as vital as allies, acquaintances usually introduce diversity to your network. They tend to hail from different social circles or industries and so they can be useful to find opportunities or intelligence outside your inner circle.

While there's a limit to the number of people you can ever know at one time, you are part of a broader network of friends of friends and friend of friends and friends—second and third degree connections—for which there is virtually no limit. Your network is bigger than you think. If you're connected to a couple hundred people on LinkedIn, you're actually at the center of an extended network more than two million people strong. If you're not asking for or giving introductions to these second or third degree connections, you are not fully leveraging your network.

Finally, remember that relationships are like any living thing: if they're not getting stronger, they're getting weaker. Strengthen relationships by sending articles, making introductions, collaborating on projects, and staying in touch.

Chapter 5: Pursue Breakout Opportunities

The trajectories of remarkable careers are not slow and steady up and to the right. Rather, they are marked by breakout opportunities—career experiences that lead to unusually rapid gains. For George Clooney, being cast in ER was his breakout opportunity.

You can develop habits of behavior that increase the likelihood you find great career opportunities:



Be in motion and court selective randomness. When you do something you stir the pot and introduce the possibility that seemingly random ideas, people, and places will collide and form new combinations and opportunities.

Tap the networks and associations of people. If you're looking for an opportunity, you're really looking for people. Historical figures like Joseph Priestly and Benjamin Franklin, or modern figures like Steve Wozniak, all tapped networks of people when they discovered oxygen, invented the modern university, and founded Apple Computer. Join conferences and clubs. Better yet, start your own.

There will be times when your back's against the wall, when you're low on resources or time, and when you'll have to get scrappy and hustle for opportunities. Constraints can be a blessing in disguise: it's amazing how resourceful one can get when one has no choice but to be resourceful. Recall the entrepreneurial stories of Airbnb and Pandora—entrepreneurs are the kings of hustle.

Chapter 6: Take Intelligent Risks



Risk tends to get a bad rap. We associate it with things like losing money in the stock market, or riding a motorcycle without a helmet. But risk isn't the enemy—it's a permanent part of life. In fact, being proactively intelligent about risk is a prerequisite for seizing those breakout opportunities. There's competition for good opportunities. And because of that, if you can intelligently take on risk, you will find opportunities others miss. Where others see a red light, you'll see green.

Every possible career move contains risk. If you don't have to seriously think about the risk involved in a career opportunity, it's probably not the breakout opportunity you're looking for.

A basic definition of risk is it's the downside consequences from any action and the likelihood those consequences come to be. Learning how to accurately assess the level of risk in a situation isn't easy. Risk is both personal and situational. What may be risky to you may not be risky to someone else.

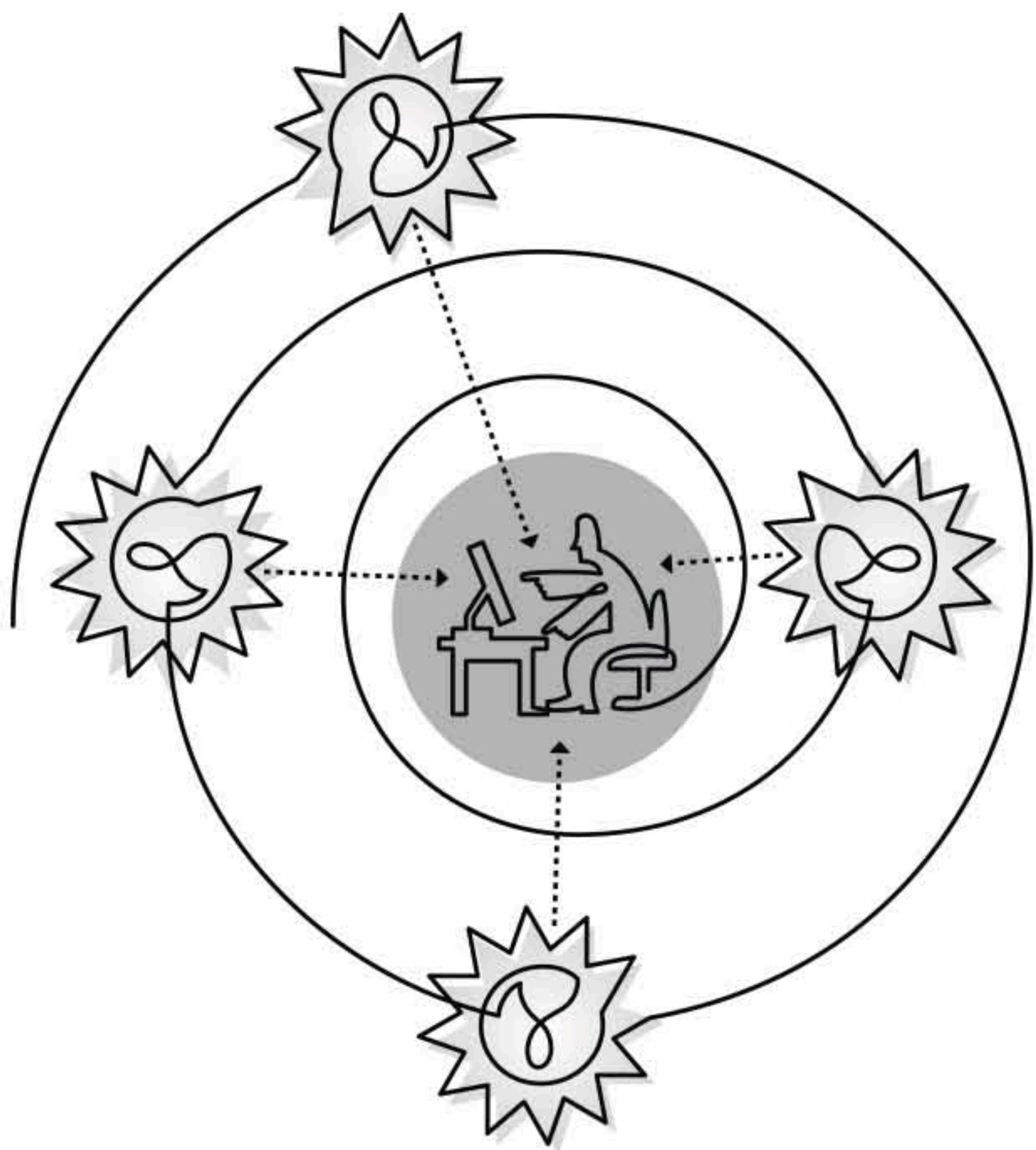
So here are a few rules of thumb for thinking about the risk associated with opportunities:

- * Overall, it's probably not as risky as you think. We're wired for evolutionary reasons to overestimate risk.
- * If you can tolerate the worst-case outcome, be open to it. If the worst-case outcome means death, homelessness, or being permanently unemployed, avoid it.

- * Can you change or reverse the decision mid-way through? If so, it's lower risk.
- * Don't conflate uncertainty with risk. There will always be unknowns. This doesn't mean it's risky.

You can never fully predict how or when ill-fortune will strike. Instead of placing faith in your ability to anticipate all that could go wrong, build up resilience to unimaginable blowup. Achieve stability by introducing low levels of volatility—by introducing small risks on a regular basis. Ideally, your day job has volatility built-in. A freelance editor has to hustle more day-to-day than the staff editor. An independent real estate agent goes hungry more days than the big-company agent. But those who regularly deal with small risks will never starve. They will never be engulfed by the big risks.

Chapter 7: Who You Know Is What You Know



A decade ago, Bill Gates wrote: “The most meaningful way to differentiate your company from your competition, the best way to put distance between you and the crowd, is to do an outstanding job with information. How you gather, manage, and use information will determine whether you win or lose.” This could not be truer today. But the way we’ve been socialized to think about information and knowledge is radically insufficient. Our educational system trains us to memorize facts stored in textbooks and then regurgitate them on an exam.

But as a modern professional, you can’t acquire knowledge this way, because the knowledge you need isn’t static—it’s always changing. You can’t cram your brain with all the relevant information that might possibly be relevant to your careers, then deploy it on exam day. In the world of work, every day is exam day—every day brings new, unpredictable challenges and decisions. Stockpiling facts won’t get you anywhere. What will get you somewhere is being able to access the information you need, when you need it.

You get the intelligence you need to make good career decisions by talking to people in your network. It's people who help you understand your assets, aspirations, and the market realities; it's people who help you vet and get introduced to possible allies and trust connections; it's people who help you track the risk attached to a given opportunity. What you get when you tap into other people's brains is called "network intelligence."

To pull intelligence from your network, you need to map your network so you know who knows what, and then you need to ask questions or send out the queries that elicit the useful answers.

Conclusion

So start tapping into your network. Start investing in skills. Start taking intelligent risks. Start pursuing breakout opportunities. But most of all, start forging your own differentiated career plans; start adapting these rules to your own adaptive life.

For life in permanent beta, the trick is to never stop starting.

The start-up is **you**.



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