

How To Be An Old Dog And Learn New Tricks

Reinventing Yourself In The Age Of AI

NOTE: This document is a summary generated by [Claude.ai](https://claude.ai/) (<https://claude.ai/>) based on a talk (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI8HfCbpcpc&t=3506s>) given by [Jonathan Stark](https://jonathanstark.com) (<https://jonathanstark.com>) on May 12th, 2023.

Good to be here! I've got a lot to cover in our time together, so let's jump right in. I want to thank Chris Moyer for suggesting this topic – it's something I'm really passionate about.

The Accelerating Pace of Change

We've got good news and bad news: change happens. That's both good and bad, but it seems to be accelerating every year. I don't think it's just the gray hair – things really are changing faster, and I blame these five technological waves:

1. Internet (early 90s)
2. Email
3. Web
4. Social
5. Mobile (iPhone launch in 2007-2008)

Smartphones are now used by an estimated 6.92 billion people worldwide – that's about 87% of the planet's population. As these technologies build on each other, we see massive adoption curves. One of my favorite statistics: more people have smartphones than have bikes, toothbrushes, pencils, or are literate. It's widely regarded as the biggest technology wave of all time.

And now we have AI. ChatGPT and friends have taken the world by storm in just the last six months. In its first five days, ChatGPT had a million users. In two months, 100 million users. Six months later, over a billion monthly active users. That makes it by far the fastest-growing consumer app of all time – Tik Tok took nine months to reach similar numbers.

Today, I want to help us all wrestle with two critical questions as we face this increasing velocity of change:

1. How do you know when to make a big change?
2. How do you know what change to make?

My Journey Through Multiple Reinventions

I'll use myself as an example because it's the history I know best. I've gone through several major transitions:

- **1990s:** Musician
- **2000s:** Coder (with many pivots within this decade – Apple script, FileMaker, PHP, web, mobile web)
- **2010s:** Consultant (doing advisory services instead of typing semicolons for money)
- **2020s:** Business Coach (for independent professionals like developers, accountants, lawyers, marketers)

Each of these changes started with what I call a “Eureka moment” – a lightning bolt of inspiration:

- **Musician (around 1985):** My neighbor Robbie Radigan came over with his electric guitar because my brother had an amp. I immediately fell in love with that guitar and didn't put it down for 10 years.
- **Coder:** Working at Staples corporate doing tedious catalog work in QuarkXPress, I built a tool with AppleScript and FileMaker that automated my job. My manager was amazed at my productivity, and soon I saw my application on screens throughout the department. I was hooked.
- **Mobile Web Developer (2007):** Watching Steve Jobs announce the iPhone live, I knew instantly that's what I wanted to do. When he said developers could build apps using HTML, CSS, and JavaScript, I was all in. I got that first iPhone, took it apart digitally, and became obsessed.
- **Coach:** The moment I realized hourly billing was nuts. I saw with almost religious clarity that costs don't drive price – price drives cost. Charging for inputs like time was a huge mistake. This revolutionary concept kicked off an exploration that changed everything that came after.

The Anatomy of Reinvention

Looking at these transitions, it's misleading to show them as clean rectangles. They're more like overlapping curves, where one identity ramps down as another ramps up. These overlapping periods are characterized by uncertainty, doubt, lack of clarity, frustration – but also excitement and exploration.

Zooming in, I've identified four distinct tracks that play out during these transitions:

1. **Eureka** - The initial lightning bolt of inspiration
2. **Obsession** - After-hours and weekend exploration, research, proof-of-concepts
3. **Milestones** - Public releases that get positive reactions (starting small, growing bigger)
4. **Identity Shift** - When you start seeing yourself as the new thing (often uncomfortable)
5. **Profitability** - Making enough money (or more) with the new identity

To summarize: Eureka's lead to obsessions. As obsessions produce milestones, your identity begins to shift. Profitability is required to sustain the obsession – if you can't support yourself doing the new thing, you'll get pulled back to the old way.

The process is rarely clean. Looking at my musician phase – the obsession hit immediately after seeing Robbie's guitar. I had small milestones (learning songs, sounding decent) leading to bigger ones (playing parties, joining bands, performing on stage). My identity shifted to "musician," but the profitability never happened.

The Value Problem

In retrospect, I know why my music career wasn't profitable. I was increasing my costs (practicing obsessively, honing my craft) but not creating value. The market doesn't care how hard you worked – it cares about the value it gets from your output.

When I was a guitarist, I focused on impressing other guitarists instead of thinking about my audience. I never asked, "How will we make these people dance or cry or laugh?" I just wanted other musicians to be impressed by my solos.

Here's the secret to making a million dollars: **Create 10 million dollars worth of value and capture 10% of it.**

When people join my mailing list and say success would be making a million dollars a year, I reply, "No problem – first create 10 million dollars worth of value, and it'll be easy." But many people aren't thinking about how to create value for others.

Creating Value

What do I mean by “create value”? Simply: **Help people you like get what they want.**

Value comes from making other people’s lives better in meaningful ways. When you find an expensive problem that someone with buying power needs solved, and you can solve it doing something you enjoy and are good at (not necessarily great), you’ve found the sweet spot.

You don’t have to be the world’s greatest guitarist to make someone feel connected and cry in an audience. You can think of many entertainers who aren’t stellar technicians but are great at playing the audience instead of their instruments. That’s where value comes from.

Answering Our Original Questions

1. **How do you know when to make a change?** If you’re feeling frustrated, bored, cynical, or bitter about your current situation, it’s probably time for a change. You’re likely in that downward slope without a new upward slope to replace it.
2. **How do you know what change to make?** Find something that excites you enough to push you through the uncomfortable overlap – the uncertainty, frustration, and lack of clarity that comes with transition. The excitement needs to sustain you until you reach those first milestones, start to feel less like an impostor, and begin creating enough value to make the new activity profitable and sustainable.

Remember, if you’re obsessed with something but can’t make it profitable, you’ll eventually have to do something else to put food on the table. Finding the intersection between your passion and creating value for others is the key to sustainable reinvention in this age of accelerating change.