

*Life-Work Reinvention Series*

*"Like an energy drink for your business" - Sarah J.*



# UNSTUCK

**DITCH THE HAMSTER WHEEL,  
REDEFINE WHO YOU ARE  
BEYOND WHAT YOU DO,  
REENERGIZE YOUR LIFE'S WORK**

MELISSA SLAWSKY, PH.D.

# UNSTUCK

Ditch the Hamster Wheel,  
Redefine Who You Are Beyond What You Do,  
Reenergize Your Life's Work

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Publisher's Note: This is a work of non-fiction. Turn this information into implementation and ACTION if you want to turn your dreams and goals into reality. As the saying goes, a goal without a wish is just a plan. This is your plan.

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my husband and son who had to put up with my mid-career crisis (i.e., “post-professor slump”) and to all the readers out there feeling “the call” to something *more*.

*“I did it for me. I liked it. I was good at it.  
And, I was really... I was alive.”*

—WALTER WHITE, “BREAKING BAD”

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## CHAPTER ONE

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# INTRO

Dear Reader,

I was exactly in your shoes a few years ago. You may be several years (and perhaps a few degrees) into your career and realize:

- You are no longer feeling the sense of fulfillment you once felt,
- You are feeling “the call” to something more,
- Certain aspects of your life’s work are no longer working for your life, and/or
- You are ready for a complete change, but aren’t sure where to start...

**Trust me when I tell you that you are not alone. More and more individuals are reaching new heights in their careers only to find out they no longer have the passion they once held for their**



**former profession. They want off the hamster wheel and out-of-the-box.**

This was certainly the case for me. After 20 years (and four degrees) pursuing what I thought would be my “dream job” in higher education (which turned out to be a nightmare), it was time for a change as I grappled with, “Now what?” and “Where do I go from here?”

I’d love to say I let go of this professional identity (i.e., Dr. Slawsky, the full-time tenure-track professor) with grace and ease, but that is not the case.

**I can tell you that this process is not easy, but it will be worth it!**

There is a great big world out there that is so much bigger than your current job title, what you did before, or the degrees on your wall. We live in an amazing time where opportunities are just WAITING for you to raise your hand, hang your hat, and write your own ticket.

**I will be introducing you to various shifts, tips, and daily practices that helped me find my way off my own hamster wheel and back into the driver’s seat**

**of a more creative, fulfilling, and meaningful life's work. Without further ado, let's get to it!**

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## CHAPTER TWO

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# STOP, LOOK, & LISTEN

(The only way out is through...)

I wish I could tell you I had a simple solution or quick fix for you. (Believe me, I would have found it.) I had to go through all five stages of grief, and *then* went on a journey or recovery and self-discovery. It took losing just about everything for me to change my ways. I want to save you a lot of time and agony, but recommend that you do not skip this step.

This first step comes from Vikki Walton, author of *Work Quilting: Piece Together Diverse Income Streams; Live an Insanely Awesome Life*. I had the pleasure of interviewing her for a summit on Work-Life Reinvention and she had the most amazing metaphors for two aspects that are critical in figuring out what you want and where you are headed.

[I'm trying to convince her to write this book, which I've named, "Stop, Look, and Listen" but she's got other projects on her hands.]

## **STOP**

**When hiking through the woods or trekking across unfamiliar terrain, travelers are instructed to STOP if they ever start to feel lost. Instead, they should sit for at least 30-minutes, really look at their surroundings, and clear their head before hazarding any guesses as to which way they should go next.**

**In fact, they can actually cause a lot of harm if they haphazardly keep going or pick any direction to keep moving.**

I'm sure Vikki explained this more eloquently, but I was *blown away* when we discussed needing to step away from the situation when the going gets rough (or when you-know-what has already hit the fan.)

If you're anything like me, your first instinct is to jump into ACTION as soon as some aspect of your life or work is out of your control. When I could see the writing on the wall for my career in academia, I immediately set out to get my K-12 teaching

certification, signed up for a million courses, and even considered pursuing another degree!

**Instead of taking some time to figure out what I really wanted, I wasted a ton of time, money, and energy in a state of FRENZIED ACTION, FOMO (fear of missing out), and FONK (fear or not knowing.)**

I'm not going to force you to meditate (which I used to consider the highest form of torture) or do yoga, but I implore you to take some time every day to get still and quiet enough to really check in with yourself. In this age of 24/7 information overload, it's so easy to get pulled in a million directions.

Although I still don't like to meditate, I have found restorative yoga and Pilates, well, restorative. **Find something – ANYTHING that allows you to quiet your mind and really connect with yourself. You're going to need this to figure out what you really want!**

Note: I had to really train myself to do this daily act of 'checking in' earlier in the day, rather than "after I've done my work" as a reward. Experiment with the time of day and feel free to break it up into smaller segments.

## LOOK

The next amazing metaphor Vikki Walton mentioned was from her interest in permaculture. **In designing an agricultural system for sustainability or permanence, ecologists spend MONTHS observing an environment before planting ONE single seed.**

**This metaphor hit me like a ton of bricks, as my work-life transition involved a ton of false starts, which resulted in wasted resources on endeavors that never panned out. I didn't spend enough time observing the landscape in these new fields I decided to pursue before I "planted all my seeds."**

For example, one of my (many) Post-Professor adventures involved electronic music composition and film score composing. While I had an absolute blast, and discovered skills I didn't even know I had, I didn't spend enough time considering the "landscape" of the film score / media composer terrain. [I'm not going to say it was a complete "bust," but due to the state of the music industry and the influx of individuals willing to do that kind of work for free, I was not in a financial position to put all of my eggs in that basket.]

I encourage you to "look" and observe the landscape of any new fields that you are considering when

navigating your work-life reinvention (especially when considering your timeline for monetizing your new endeavor.)

## **LISTEN**

**There is no mind-blowing metaphor for this one, but the basic premise is that you need to start listening to yourself. Every day, you are going to do everything you can to ensure that you are operating from the internal, rather than being driven by the external.**

I like to call this shift, “From FOMO (fear of missing out) to MOFO (maverick open for opportunity.)” When we are in a state of FOMO, we base all of our decisions and lead our daily lives based on what we *think* everybody else expects of us. We are bombarded with messages 24/7 by society, the media, our parents, etc. as to the lives we are “supposed” to lead.

**Sometimes you have to shut out the noise – (hence, the “stop” part of this step) and start listening to yourself...**



## **YOUR ACTION STEPS:**

1. STOP, check-in with yourself, and decide what you want, before jumping into action.
2. LOOK, observe before planting seeds in a new endeavor, or at least before putting all of your eggs in one basket.

## **Make a list of exciting possibilities for new endeavors. Then ask yourself:**

- What is my timeline (or deadline) for monetizing this new endeavor?
  - Does this align with the timeline in which I can actually start making money, or do I need to come up with additional plans? (e.g., side hustle or slower transition)
  - Who am I competing with in this new industry?
  - Who seems to be doing very well in this field I'm considering? What are they doing that allows them to perform well? Am I willing to do those things? (or at least try them)
  - In your observations, do you notice any differences between what is said in the industry and what is actually occurring?
3. LISTEN, build in a daily practice that ensures you are listening to yourself. Make a plan

right now to spend 5, 10, or even 30-minutes  
every day quieting your mind.

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## CHAPTER THREE

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# WHAT *FULFILLS* YOU VERSUS WHAT HAS DRIVEN YOU IN THE PAST

**Part of getting off the hamster wheel is to define what the ‘hamster wheel’ actually *is* in the context of your life’s work. Some refer to this as “the rat race,” or being “chained to a desk,” etc. Can you dig a little deeper and see what has driven your actions in the past?**

For example, when my “dream job” in academia turned out to be a “bust,” I knew that it was time to come up with a *new* dream. However, I couldn’t help but feel that there was no “pot of gold at the end of the rainbow” when it came to finishing all those degrees.

In taking a step back, I realized that this metaphor could apply to how I lived my entire life up to this point...I was continually pursuing degree after degree, certification after certification, and one shiny gold star or stamp of approval after another.

I'm a lifelong learner (or as I like to say, a personal and professional development "junkie"), and I do believe the desire to never stop learning is a good one; but when is enough ENOUGH?!

**Your drivers may not be the same as mine, but here is when you know what drives you does not *fulfill* you – there is never a finish line. When you finally attain (or obtain) what you were so driven to pursue, you are immediately compelled to seek out the next “thing.”**

One of the greatest examples in my own life is the fact that I didn't even sit through my own Ph.D. graduation ceremony. Finishing that degree was like putting my head through a meat grinder! I “he-manned” through that thing through four moves, a pregnancy (which turned into a baby), and more challenges than I'd like to admit, but I finished.

On the day of the ceremony, I flew in from New Jersey to Tampa with my family in tow for the

commencement. I literally ran in, grabbed my piece of paper, had my picture taken, and went out the back door to interview for an internship in library science. [Of course, I was always making backup plans for my backup plans.]

I couldn't even sit for five minutes and just soak in the fact that I *finished* the damned thing! My achievement addiction left me feeling empty and the only "fix" was to find "the next thing."

### **Stepping off the hamster wheel...**

**Once you discover what the 'hamster wheel' is for you (e.g., achievement, significance, recognition, shiny objects, possessions, etc.), you'll want to figure out what *fulfills* you ASAP!**

**You will find that stepping off the hamster wheel is more of a withdrawal process (requiring a 12-step program), than a quick fix.**

I actually figured out what fulfills me by accident, although a few simple assessments (discussed in Ch. 5) could have told me the same thing. In my attempt to hold onto my place in academia, I began rebranding myself as a contemporary music professor for a more innovative environment.

Since some of my favorite students from my last position were composers, I figured that I better start composing so I could “walk the walk,” rather than just “talk the talk.” I bought my first MIDI controller and a ton of virtual instruments, and just started composing.

I was having an absolute blast being *creative* – in the moment, as I improvised. [As a pianist, I was taught to be RE-creative, and encouraged to teach others the same in higher education.] **I realized that being CREATIVE was the key to my fulfillment... until I started seeking outside validation.**

My journey into electronic music composition expanded into music licensing, audio production, and film score composing. I felt as if I was finally using all of my knowledge and skills in a way that was *innovative* and *relevant!*

**However, as soon as I took the focus off the internal fulfillment I felt, and started chasing external validation** (in the form of imdb credits, film and media placements, Soundcloud plays, and monetary compensation), **I sucked the passion right out of it.**

While composing was definitely a worthwhile endeavor, and it certainly allowed me to heal during

my “post-professor slump,” I learned that it’s something I can’t do when I’m worried about how I’m going to pay the bills.

**The intrinsic motivation to do it went away when I was too concerned about the financial rewards that will follow. Nevertheless, I have found that being *creative* on a daily basis – whether it’s writing a blog post or article, brainstorming a new business idea, or creating a relationship with a new client is the true key to fulfillment.**



**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. What has driven you in the past?
2. What really fulfills you?
3. I enjoy being in a state of creativity when I do the following activities (make a list.)

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## CHAPTER FOUR

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# CREATIVITY OVER CONSUMPTION

(or creative v. reactive)

**In my own experience, it took me 20-years (and four degrees) to figure out that my version of the “hamster wheel” was chasing one achievement after another, looking for the proverbial “pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.”**

**Although it took a very difficult experience for me to learn this lesson, I finally figured out that the key to fulfillment for me was to choose creativity over consumption on a daily basis.**

While not everyone may identify themselves as creative, creativity simply means:

*“the use of the imagination or original ideas, especially in the production of an artistic work.”*

Whether your life's work involve an artistic endeavor or not, creativity (i.e., inventiveness, innovation, originality, individuality, imagination) is something that everybody has and certainly, anyone can develop.

We often think of creativity in terms of artists, musicians, authors, film makers, etc. However, if you think about it, every business, brand, organization, or institution is an entity that was *created*. One or more individuals started with a VISION, an idea, and/or a mission to create something that solved a problem or fulfilled a need for a group of individuals.

Creativity plays a role in the peripheral aspects of those businesses/organizations that we see on a daily basis (e.g., branding, marketing, messaging, ad campaigns, sales pages), to the products and services they provide, and on the back-end, the processes and procedures that make delivery possible.

While we often hear about profit margins, revenue streams, and “the bottom line,” creativity plays a *big* role in getting those endeavors from idea to market.

**On the other hand, one of the major “road blocks” or impediments to creativity (and certainly fulfillment, in my experience) is that of consumption.**

**In our fast-paced daily lives of information-overload, we are bombarded with information, messages, and media 24/7.**

Buy this!

Wear that!

Watch this!

Eat that!

**When you spend too much time consuming the ideals, philosophies, and values of others, you may one day wake up to realize you are living a life of someone else's choosing.**

I have also found that a day that begins and ends with consumption (from information to media, and even works of art) leaves me in a perpetual state of FOMO (fear of missing out), FONK (fear of not knowing), and lack of fulfillment. It's a vicious, never-ending cycle... but here is the antidote.

**Every single day, before you begin to consume *any* kind of information (e.g., an article, webinar, Facebook newsfeed, or your favorite show on Netflix), open up a Word document and write something (2-10 minutes).**

Figure out where you stand.

What do you feel?

What are your beliefs?

**If writing isn't your medium, pick another outlet and simply CREATE something.**

Begin each day from a place of listening to yourself (the internal), rather than operating from the external (i.e., in reaction to what you see on the 'highlight reels' you see on social media.)

**First, this shift will ensure that you are spending a part of the day intentionally listening to yourself.**

**Next, you're going to find that being creative (in any way you that you enjoy) will leave you feeling much more *fulfilled* than simply consuming the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of others.**

In my own daily life, I've learned that creating something (a musical composition, a blog post, an eBook, etc.) is *way* more fulfilling than the empty achievements I pursued in my past. [Including regurgitating the musical compositions of composers who came hundreds of years before me, which

eventually made me feel like a glorified record player.]

I've had to train myself to get into this creative space *before* I allow myself to consume info, messaging, and 'what everybody else is doing.' Otherwise, I could easily be found in a state of FOMO (fear of missing out) or FONK (fearing of not knowing.)

**In other words, I want you to shift your perspective and rearrange your day so that you are operating from a place of being CREATIVE and not REACTIVE.**

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. How much of your day is spent being creative, rather than consuming?
2. How can you ensure creativity plays a bigger role in your daily life?
3. And, if you're willing to try a 1-day experiment where you begin and end your day being creative (rather than being a consumer), how much more fulfilled does that make you feel?

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## WHAT ARE YOUR CORE VALUES?

Before you embark on any career change or business venture, you'll want to spend some time figuring out what your values are.

**These values – what you find most *meaningful* in this world will forever determine if your life's work is going to bring you fulfillment and joy.** These core values will become your criteria for taking any steps towards a new destination, which may help prevent you from falling prey to “shiny object syndrome.”

For myself, it wasn't until I realized that creativity, innovation, and connection were my top values, that I stopped scouring [higherjobs.com](http://higherjobs.com) like a crack addict looking for my next “fix.” While I loved my students,



and enjoyed teaching, the “ivory towers” were no longer in alignment to my core values. (While those activities were feeding my ego, they were not feeding my soul.)

**In determining your core values, you may want to make a list of what you *know* to be true for your life’s work and business.** Then, ask a trusted friend or colleague what they see as your core values.

[While it’s not always recommended to solicit external feedback in self-examination, sometimes your most trusted friends and colleagues can see something we can’t.]

**Next, you’re going to embark on a journey of self-discovery by taking a few assessments.** You may find some of them a bit ‘woo,’ but you might be amazed at what you discover about yourself.

**Archetypes:** These Jungian archetypes will include the positive and negative sides of your primary and secondary personality types. For example, someone with a great work ethic can be high-achieving in some areas, yet when not in balance can lead to overdoing, burnout, and forsaking everything for one’s career. (Ahem, enough about me... this is about you.)

You can probably find a ton of assessments on Jungian Archetypes online. Here is one of my favorites:

<http://cerriesmooney.com/how-to-complete-the-test/>

**Personality Tests:** Personality assessments may seem a little obvious, but they can save you a ton of time in the long-run.

For example, an introvert who requires a certain amount of quiet time may find that a high-paced office environment is not for them, etc.

[Similarly, an extraverted teacher-at-heart won't be happy stuck behind a computer all day, even if they are composing really cool music for a feature film, but again, enough about me...)

Again, there are various personality tests online (free and paid.) Here is one of my favorite free options:

<https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>

**Are you noticing any patterns here? Are there any clues as to why you were feeling less fulfilled in your life's work?**

**DISC profile:** Understanding what drives you and how you naturally function in any work environment

can be extremely helpful when navigating a career change (or discovering that you're meant to be an entrepreneur.)

Here is one of my favorite free options:

<http://www.tonyrobbins.com/disc/>

**The main reason for taking any of these tests is to figure out – what really fulfills you, versus what may be driving you?**

For example, I had to figure out that chasing achievements and “ego candy” were my primary *drivers* in my former career. However, being creative and entrepreneurial (while really helping people in a way that was in-alignment with my core values) was fulfilling.

In a nutshell, I had to figure out:

Creativity → Fulfillment → Joy → Meaning

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. What are your core values? (top 5)
2. What core values have your trusted friends and/or colleagues suggested?
3. Are there any trends or patterns that occur between your primary and secondary archetypes, personality assessments, and DISC profile?
4. And, if something in your current life's work is no longer in alignment with your core values, what are you going to do about it?

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## CHAPTER SIX

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# DON'T WASTE ANY TIME TRYING TO FIND YOUR “ONE TRUE PURPOSE”

(Do this instead.)

**The “one true purpose” trap is one of the greatest barriers to moving forward when evolving your life’s work. Don’t even go there!**

Let’s face it... You probably have more than one talent or skillset, and would probably function very well in multiple roles. Here is a recommendation, and then, an alternative.

**Rather than trying to find your “one true purpose,” it’s time for you to start living ON PURPOSE.**

**By “on purpose,” I mean that you do what you need to do (on a daily basis) to ensure that your work, life, and/or business is in alignment and integrity to your core values.**

For myself, a set of daily practices (prioritizing creativity over consumption, mindfulness, etc.) have allowed me to do just that (although I admit, it sometimes feels more like a 12-step program than a “quick fix.”)

**Here is the alternative. You want to find the “sweet spot” between the following:**

- a) **What are your “super powers?”** These are the activities that come super easily to you, they almost *energize* you! Others ask how you do them... you are practically compelled to do these things.

Go ahead and list them out. I will share mine and we can compare notes.

## Melissa's Super Powers

---

1. 'OCD ORGANIZATION' ABILITIES
2. RECOGNIZE ANY CELEBRITY FACE OR VOICE (INCLUDING CHILD ACTORS AFTER 20 YEARS)
3. MONETIZE EVERYONE I COME INTO CONTACT WITH
4. TURN ANY RAP, HIP HOP, OR ROCK SONG INTO A SAD, CINEMATIC PIANO TRACK

The primary reason for starting with these “super powers” is because the process of navigating a career change or building a business requires quite a lot of energy. You’ll want to ensure that the actual work does not drain you (or require a ton of physical or mental resources.)

Next, cross off any activity that you don’t enjoy doing. Circle the top 3 that you could feel passionate about, and move onto the next step...



## Melissa's Super Powers Monetized

1. OCD Organization	2. Celebrity Recognition	3. Monetization	4. Piano tracks
Professional organizing Cleanout service Premium packing service "Hoarders" type show	Erm...	Business Consulting Business Coaching Brand strategist Ecourse developer Book publisher + Business Coach Online marketer	Create tracks, give them away for free, hope to profit off the backend with ad revenue, Make a Youtube channel Create a Soundcloud page, Arranging service Dark covers, Teach others to arrange

For example, my abilities to recognize any celebrity face or voice (with laser-like precision) or re-imagine any Lil Wayne song into a gorgeous piano rendition weren't going to pay the bills (unless someone creates a celebrity-crime unit for the FBI or music becomes "not-free" again.)

However, I had two remaining choices when it came to the "super powers" I could monetize.

- 1) **OCD organizational abilities** could be turned into a professional organizing business (or a reality TV show called, "The Hoarding Interventionist"), but I don't want to make people cry when I bring a big dumpster to their house and start getting rid of all their stuff. Getting rid of stuff is one of *my* greatest

joys in life, but that's not the case for everyone.

- 2) **Monetization (with motivation)**, which combined with my love of teaching, could easily be turned into consulting. Over the years, I became obsessed with online business and self-publishing of all media, and would try to convince anybody to let me monetize them. [From my students, to my yoga teacher, to the guy in a bar giving advice about food, who need to start a blog called, “This Dude Knows a Lot About Food.”]

I am literally *compelled* to do this! Now we're talking!

**If you haven't found a clear “winner,” no worries. I have a few more questions to help you. Keep this list handy for the next chapter, where we discuss “profiting from your passions.”**

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

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# RESIST THE URGE TO PROFIT FROM ALL OF YOUR PASSIONS

(Do this instead.)

I may catch a lot of ‘flack’ for this, but I don’t care. I want you to know the *truth*. You do not want to attempt to profit from all of your passions.

1. Doing what you love *will* start to feel like work when you’re doing it 8+ hours a day.
2. Your passions may change as you grow and evolve.

**By all means, you want to be *passionate* about your life’s work, but there is a more sustainable alternative.** [Or – plan on having multiple income streams, so your passions aren’t forced to pay the bills.]

On a personal note, you are reading the recommendations of someone who followed their “passions” for 26 years and 4 degrees. I started learning the piano at age 11, and was teaching by age 16. Fast-forward 21 years, and between burnout, back surgery, and bankruptcy, it was time for a change...

Although I still teach music for fun (working only with students who light me up), I am no longer willing to “ride or die” for it (or churn out the next generation of the overeducated and underemployed.)

While, I did spend some time venturing into electronic music composition and film score composing, leveraging all of my knowledge and skills in a creative, modern, and relevant way – the pressure of monetizing those endeavors sucked the passion right out of them. So, I was forced to take a hard look in the mirror *beyond* what I was *passionate* about.

### **The sustainable alternative:**

#### **Monetize your mission (and/or message)**

If you can combine your mission (or message) with one of your monetizable super powers (as discussed in the previous chapter), you’ll have a clear direction for where to go in your life’s work.

And, if your career or business does involve one of your passions, combining it with your mission will ensure that you *remain* passionate when the going gets rough (or the money's not flowing.)

**Answer the following questions:**

- a) **Start with something general. I help people \_\_\_\_\_ (whether they like it or not.)**

Again, I am asking you to consider the activities that *energize* you, do not require much mental or physical resources, and you feel *compelled* to do them on a daily basis (e.g., your “super powers” or zone of genius.)

Navigating a career change or building a business *will* require all the time, energy, and financial resources you can muster. You'll want to ensure that the actual work does not drain you during this phase.

For example, my OCD organizational abilities (i.e., “Stuff Tetris”) could potentially help people, but again, I don't want to make people cry when I bring a big dumpster to their house and start getting rid of all their stuff.

I feel compelled to do this, though it's not always appreciated. [You should see my husband and son cower in fear, like Julia Roberts in "Sleeping with the Enemy," every Sunday night when my OCD cleaning frenzy kicks in.]

On the other hand, monetization and my obsession with online marketing could easily be turned into consulting and strategizing, while making a difference.

As a professor, it was really important to me that my students were equipped with the skills to sustain a viable living upon graduation (which didn't match the curriculum I was required to teach), so *this* "super power" (and passion) could easily be tied to my mission.

**b) What are my beliefs that *nobody* could change, no matter what?**

What are you willing to "ride or die" (or at least 'couch surf') for? Perhaps you've experienced something in your life that *no* amount of reading could have ever prepared you for, or no amount of research would ever change your mind.

**c) Have you spent any of your life's work fighting any kind of "system?" (If so, I want you to turn it around, so instead of**

**wasting energy *fighting* the system, you help those being affected *by* that system.)**

For example, all my dissertation research was secretly a big “rant” as to why the educational system needed to be changed, so that future music teachers could sustain a viable living upon graduation.

As you can imagine, trying to change system that’s based on centuries-old traditions did not go over well on the tenure-track. Looking back, I should have spent my time and energy *helping* new teachers, rather than *fighting* the system that’s churning them out. [Live and learn...]

**d) What are some of the hardest lessons you’ve had to learn? (Bonus points if what you learned goes against “traditional wisdom” or everything you’ve been taught.)**

*“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.” - Socrates*

I promise, this is not the contrarian in me looking for controversy. These “bonus points” are actually your



unique value proposition in the marketplace and what will set you apart from the crowd.

- e) **In overcoming one of your most difficult challenges, what do you wish someone would have told you that would have saved you a ton of time, energy, and resources? [Think back to that time, right before the turning point, where you finally figured it out.]**

Trust me when I tell you that people would rather hear, “I went through this really difficult time, but I turned it around, and here are the nuggets of wisdom I learned along the way” rather than, “my dissertation research showed...”

Telling your story or your version of “the hero’s journey,” including the trials and tribulations you experienced and how you overcame them is one of the best ways to convey your *message*, which led you to your *mission*.

**If you can combine your mission and message with your “super powers,” which you are truly passionate about using, – this is a much more sustainable career option or business model than simply ‘profiting from your passions.’**



(As you can see, Photoshop is not one of my super powers... but you get the point.)

One last note, this is by no means an exhaustive list of how to find your best life's work. And, if you do have a passion that you would like to build your life's work around, if you attach it to your mission or message, you will have something "bigger" to hold onto when the going gets rough. When there's a will, there's a way!

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

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# REFRAMING “LOSS” AND “FAILURE”

**When leaving a career path or business endeavor behind, it’s easy to focus on what we are losing (especially when we invested quite a bit of time and education to get it.)**

By all means, allow yourself to go through the stages of grief that you need to. However, it can be more helpful to reframe “loss” as “making a trade.” Try to replace any statements of loss with “trading up,” “onward and upward,” “growth and evolving,” etc.

In my own experience, my ‘losing streak’ started with me losing things *not* by choice. It started with the title. Then, my professional network fell away. Soon, I was going through a bankruptcy.

I'll never forget the moment where everything changed for me. The fate of my grand piano was in the bankruptcy trustee's hands. He asked me, "Do you want to surrender?" [as in, surrender the property to the state as part of my bankruptcy case]

The answer was a resounding "yes!" You see, every time I saw my grand piano, I thought, "that's what I *could* be doing" or "that's what I *should* be doing" (rather than moving onto future endeavors.) It was a constant reminder of what I was letting go and my heart ached a little every time I saw it.

In the end, the trustee allowed me to keep my grand piano, but I decided to sell it anyway. I was nervous when the mover came to take it away, but felt an enormous sense of *freedom* once it was gone. I had an entire room free. I no longer had to feel guilty for leaving my previous business behind. I had created the space to move on and "answer the call" to something *more*.

#### REFRAMING FAILURE -

**When it comes to reframing failure, you may find that the same traits, characteristics, and work habits that made you a high-performer in your current (or former) career may be getting in the way of your new endeavors.**

It is also very common for smart people to get in their own way as they often get stuck in analysis-paralysis, perfectionism, or all-or-nothing thinking. The same work-horse tendencies which made you a superstar in the past can lead to burnout, which makes any life's work unsustainable.

It's important that you learn to work smarter and not harder, learn to walk (when you want to run), and reframe what may initially feel like failure as feedback. It may not be easy, but it will be worth it!



## CHAPTER NINE

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# RALLY YOUR TROOPS

(Don't go it alone.)

**Navigating a career change or major shift in your life's work can be a lonely process when your professional connections start to fall away.**

You may also notice that friends and family start to look at you as if you're running away with the circus when you decide to make major changes in your life.

**You'll want to have some sort of sounding board, allies, and support system in place.**

And, for those "lone wolfs" out there (like me) who think you work better alone, even *you* would benefit from having SOMEONE in your corner.

In rallying your troops, think of Season 7 of "Game of Thrones," where a revolution was being staged



against the tyrannical Lannister family. Rather than make any rash decisions, every house was forced to pull their resources, put their differences aside, and come together for the greater good.

**Winter is coming! Get a coach, join a meet-up, and enlist trusted friends to support you during this process.**

## CHAPTER TEN

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# STOP WAITING FOR PERMISSION AND START “TRYING ON SOME HATS”

**Believe me when I tell you that you can't “think” your way into a career change or major shift in your life's work. (I've tried.) It's going to take *action* to move you from where you are now to where you want to go.**

You'll also want to figure out –

What fits?

What doesn't?

What lights you up?

**Right now, I want you to list a few options that seem interesting and think of these as:**

- a) Hats that you are going to try on for size**
- b) Experiments in which *nothing* is at stake if things don't go perfectly as planned. Your goal is to simply find out if the grass really is greener on that other side (and if you can see yourself doing that in the long-term.)**

If you think you want to be a coach, call up one of your friends and ask if you can coach them. (or, don't tell them you're coaching them and just help them.)

If you're interested in podcasting, grab a mic and a friend and interview them.

If you want to be a writer, open up a word document and start writing.

**You would be amazed at the opportunities that surround you on a daily basis to do whatever you want! Unless you want to be a lawyer, doctor, nurse, or other field that requires a specialized education or certification, you will find that many job options this day and age exist on a level playing**

**field... Especially when you stop waiting for *permission*.**

Let me give you an example. While I spent an entire year filling out application after application for a new teaching position, I landed my first film scoring gig simply by ...

[Wait for it.]

Answering an ad on Craigslist!

I learned more during that experience than I would have in any educational program and discovered skills I didn't even know I had!

**I simply had to raise my hand, hand my shingle, and say, "I'm a film score composer. Here is what I can do for you, and for samples of my work, check out my Soundcloud page." It was really that simple!**

**YOUR ACTION STEPS:**

1. List a few ‘hats’ that you’d like to try on for size.
2. Now, list some ‘low stakes’ experiments to try them on.
3. Don’t waste *any* time trying to decide. You will not know until you try, and even then, you do not have to choose one. You can be multipassionate, with multiple income streams. For now, your job is to simply “try, before you buy.”

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

**Congratulations! You've taken some action towards a more fulfilling and meaningful life's work.**

It takes an incredible amount of bravery to answer “the call” towards something more, or even *admit* that aspects of your work are no longer working for your life.

While most people sit on the sidelines and dream about making changes in their lives, you're actually doing something about it! So, give yourself a pat on the back, or at least a break.

**Your new motto is going to be, “I want my next life's work to be my BEST life's work, and that**

**may take a little more time than a quick fix or simple solution.”**

The most difficult step is to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

I'll be rooting for you!

## **ACTION STEPS:**

1. Stop, look, and listen before planting any seeds in a new endeavor.
2. Figure out what *fulfills* you, versus what has driven you in the past.
3. Prioritize creativity over consumption in your daily life.
4. Figure out your core values and use them as a barometer to make decisions and avoid “shiny object syndrome.”
5. Avoid the “one true purpose trap” by figuring out your monetizable “super powers.”
6. Resist the urge to profit from your passions and instead opt for the sustainable alternative: Monetize your mission or message, aligned with your “super powers.”
7. Begin reframing “loss” as “trading up,” and “failure” as feedback when leaving your career path behind.
8. Rally your troops instead of going it alone.
9. Stop waiting for permission and start “trying on some hats” with low-stakes experiments.
10. Keep putting one foot in front of the other.  
Keep going!



## WHAT DID YOU THINK?

Thank you for reading my book! I know you could have picked any number of books to read on the subject, and I'm extremely grateful you chose mine.

If you enjoyed this book and found some benefit to reading this, I'd love to hear from you! If you would take the time to post a review on Amazon.com, your feedback will help me make this book even better!

[It is my goal for the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition to include the perspectives and success stories of others.]

I wish you all the best in your future endeavors!



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Melissa Slawsky (aka, “The Business Growth Maestra”) is a Branding & Business Performance Strategist at [melissaslawsky.com](http://melissaslawsky.com). She helps extraordinary consultants and expert service providers shift from high-performance to high-*IMPACT*, so they can hit their business goals faster (and simplify their lives.)

Prior to taking the leap into entrepreneurship, Melissa served as an Assistant Professor of Music at a variety of colleges and universities in the Southeastern United States until she realized that being “Dr. Slawsky” was feeding her ego – but not her soul.

A self-admitted personal and professional development “junkie,” she leveraged her teaching

skills and obsession with all-things online marketing to work behind-the-scenes for a few 7-figure coaching and training organizations before striking out on her own.

Melissa resides in Asheville, North Carolina where she enjoys spending time with her husband, son, and four birds.