



Continually Reboot Your Career

Dean DeBiase, B.S. Marketing 1980
Chief Executive Officer, TNS Media
Chairman, StartupPartners.com
Co-Founder, ThinkRemarkable.com

Whether you just graduated from business school, are in a graduate program or mid career, it's never too early (or late) to reboot your career.

The traditional roles in business are being irrevocably redefined because of economic need, industry consolidation or marketplace-driven innovation. The path you've planned to become VP, CFO, CMO, COO or CEO has been re-engineered and re-routed into countless directions. And no one really knows if those positions will even be relevant or in existence 10 to 15 years from now – by then CTO could stand for Chief Trauma Officer!

I've been fortunate to help many friends and colleagues reboot their careers and in the process have developed some perspectives, behaviors and tools now known as the Reboot List. The most important follow.

Mash-up your resume You've probably been told that you shouldn't just master one thing or be on a singular career track today. That's true, but what do you do instead? I'm a product of mashing-up and can testify it works. Most importantly, now it is a minimum survival requirement because it can create the best mix of in-demand skills.

A career mash-up is a combination of diverse skills, sensibilities, attitudes, judgment and knowledge taken from multiple educational opportunities and work experiences, which are integrated to benefit you and your organization. As with a web technology mash-up, you too can bring together skill sets that are uniquely marketable. The innovator who builds a career by taking advantage of a myriad of experiences will win in the era of hybrid talent.

Think entrepreneurially People who combine entrepreneurial drive with operating discipline that comes from working in larger organizations are ahead of the game. The innovators are those who understand how to leverage these diverse experiences into value, not just titles on a resume. They synthesize bits and pieces of what they've been exposed to in both of these environments and develop more impactful roles and approaches that previously did not exist.

Even if you are stuck at a big company, you can become an entrepreneur at heart. Becoming a methodical risk taker is a good place to start. Think about how you'd run or fix your organization, as if it was your own, driving the decisions that could make or break the company. In a down reactionary economy, risk takers are not appreciated as they should be, but they are if a successful project or company turn-around takes place. There are lots of messy opportunities out there that need fixing – get involved in one and you will be well positioned to excel in the next rebound.

Be global Good mash-ups move beyond traditional curriculum, training or job experience. Develop at least two more data points of information,

experience or perspective. My top recommendation is entrepreneurial and international skills because this combination makes for hard charging, worldly talent.

To be global you must build multinational know-how. It's a vibrant growth area that has become the center of business. If you get an M.B.A., go for a global curriculum. However, learning another language is a better choice now – it cannot be faked in translation. And don't forget to travel, read and volunteer for international assignments before actually getting a real one.

Master communications Become a multi-media writer; it can be your most important mass-communications tool if you really work at it. Work on becoming a stronger speaker as well. But, move beyond the Power Point crutch and you will become a more believable communicator.

Learning never ends and the curve is accelerating. Forget "work hard/play hard." Be all-business for now, a 24/7 information sponge. Don't just seek information, go for broad-based insights and develop your own. To start, access what your customers are reading, viewing and hearing – you may even find a mash-up opportunity there.

Stay wired. Help your organization profit from Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs and the next thing being invented. Though vital to business communication, these tools have not replaced personal interaction. So, it's also good to seek projects that involve direct communication across the organization.

Leverage clients Immerse yourself in all aspects of business. Traditionally, most senior management worked their way up from the mailroom. This rite of passage was an indispensable way to understand an organization from the inside out. Those days are over, but there is another track – clients.

Everyone works for the client but few employees truly feel this or ever deal with clients. No matter your job, there is always room for an organization to become more client-centric, and you can help. Whether it is listening in at a call center, going on a sales call, standing in a mall thanking customers, or just helping during peak times ... do it and keep doing it – listening to and assisting clients and potential clients will make you remarkably valuable.

Embody leadership Practice leading and you will become one. Leadership development unofficially flows from key projects, like innovation. So set your own path to leadership by becoming an innovation hound – foster it in yourself and in the people with whom you work.

Ideas come from the most unexpected mashed-up sources, like turnaround opportunities. Don't limit your knowledge to one discipline or market and try industry skipping. Be worldly because applying ideas learned in one discipline or industry to another is an important tool for driving creativity and growth.

Growth is what will get you noticed. Profitable growth will advance you forward – if you treat people well along the way. Try treating everyone at work like an unpaid volunteer at a non-profit ... it can make you a magnetic leader. You can practice by leading real volunteers on weekends to get the hang of it.

Journey creatively It's true that each step you take in your career will have consequences down the road, often in ways not foreseen or anticipated. But we no longer live in a linear world so you need to cover a lot of ground to be a player in the next generation of business.

Words of Wisdom:

Look for ways to make work fun. The more people really enjoy the work, the more vibrant and competitive the company will be. Try to work in or with organizations that challenge your intellect, broaden your learning and have a product or service that you can get excited about.

Learn to give back, starting with your alma mater. There are many ways to do this, with your time, skills or money. With a multitude of areas to choose from, find one, stick with it and develop it into a life-long relationship and passion.