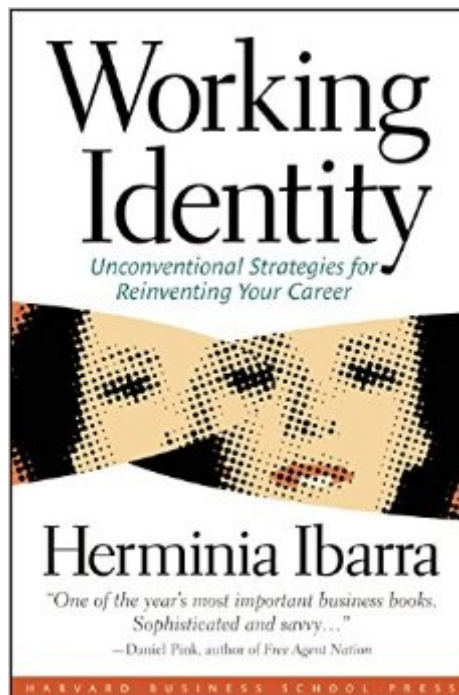


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# Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies For Reinventing Your Career



## Synopsis

How Successful Career Changers Turn Fantasy into Reality Whether as a daydream or a spoken desire, nearly all of us have entertained the notion of reinventing ourselves. Feeling unfulfilled, burned out, or just plain unhappy with what weâ€™re doing, we long to make that leap into the unknown. But we also hold on, white-knuckled, to the years of time and effort weâ€™ve invested in our current profession. In this powerful book, Herminia Ibarra presents a new model for career reinvention that flies in the face of everything weâ€™ve learned from "career experts." While common wisdom holds that we must first know what we want to do before we can act, Ibarra argues that this advice is backward. Knowing, she says, is the result of doing and experimenting. Career transition is not a straight path toward some predetermined identity, but a crooked journey along which we try on a host of "possible selves" we might become. Based on her in-depth research on professionals and managers in transition, Ibarra outlines an active process of career reinvention that leverages three ways of "working identity": experimenting with new professional activities, interacting in new networks of people, and making sense of what is happening to us in light of emerging possibilities. Through engrossing stories&#151;from a literature professor turned stockbroker to an investment banker turned novelist&#151;Ibarra reveals a set of guidelines that all successful reinventions share. She explores specific ways that hopeful career changers of any background can:

- Explore possible selves
- Craft and execute "identity experiments"
- Create "small wins" that keep momentum going
- Survive the rocky period between career identities
- Connect with role models and mentors who can ease the transition
- Make time for reflection&#151;without missing out on windows of opportunity
- Decide when to abandon the old path in order to follow the new
- Arrange new events into a coherent story of who we are becoming.

A call to the dreamer in each of us, *Working Identity* explores the process for crafting a more fulfilling future. Where we end up may surprise us.

## Book Information

Paperback: 199 pages

Publisher: Harvard Business School Press (January 1, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1591394139

ISBN-13: 978-1591394136

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (77 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #107,685 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #172 in [Books > Business & Money > Job Hunting & Careers > Job Hunting](#) #578 in [Books > Business & Money > Job Hunting & Careers > Guides](#) #1609 in [Books > Self-Help > Success](#)

## Customer Reviews

I have read the "What Color is your Parachute"- types of career management books and, as Ibarra says in *Working Identity*, while books such as these provide useful, introspective exercises for inventorying your skillsets and interests, they have never provided me with the magical answer I was looking for in terms of what I want to do with my life. If anything I actually became more frustrated, because I had invested all of this time doing the exercises and still only had a few faint ideas for careers that might interest me. *Working Identity* provides a very refreshing perspective, and one that I agree with. That while introspection is good and necessary, it is doubtful that introspection alone will provide us with the answer of what we want to do. Rather, only through new experiences and relationships will we begin to "think out of the box", so to speak, and get a true sense for what we enjoy and for what motivates us. I highly recommend this book to anybody who feels stuck in a professional rut and is not quite sure how to get out of it. Not only will you be able to empathize with some of the individuals in the case studies, but I believe the book will help you to begin thinking in a new way, in terms of how to initiate change in your life. However, I do have a few criticisms of the book. At several times I had to ask myself who was Ibarra's intended audience, career changers or her fellow professors? Many times it just sounded unnecessarily "academic" in tone, particularly in the beginning of the book where she uses several pages to form "models" for her particular theories.

I recommend this book because it turns the world of career counseling upside down, offering a welcome antidote to the traditional career counselors, outplacement folks and coaches who rely heavily on "assessment" and chirpy philosophies of, "If you dream it, you can do it." Ibarra's greatest contribution is to emphasize that self-analysis and action must go together. A focus on self-analysis is easier for the client and more lucrative for a counselor or coach. As she says, implementation is more challenging and difficult than diagnosis. Additionally, she goes beyond the typical "Get out and network!" advice, offering a theory-based prescription to network with strangers and distant acquaintances. And she emphasizes that career change is a winding road, not a straight line -- something any experienced career counselor should know. Her examples echo other recent research by career psychologists, focusing on serendipity as a career force. Mid-career changers

have to be especially creative when making career decisions. My only quibble is that her examples come from very well-educated, successful, sophisticated, under-50 career changers. (I detected one 53-year-old male, mentioned briefly.) Those over fifty tend to face additional challenges. However, the principles can be used by anyone at any career stage. *Working Identity* has a more serious tone than the typical self-help book, perhaps reflecting the author's research and the Harvard publishing imprint. It is not a fast, entertaining read, like so many self-help books, and the author offers no exercises to the reader. Ibarra does not discuss social support that might come from friends, family or a paid coach or counselor.

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