



ARE YOU READY TO REINVENT YOURSELF?

Erin Brockovich - a woman whose tenacity and courage forced a corrupt corporation into a \$333 million settlement, the largest direct-action settlement in American history - has become a symbol for the modern woman who reinvents herself. How did Erin transition from a broke single mom of three, with two failed marriages behind her, and little formal education to the stuff that movie heroes are made of? How did she turn her life around and become an inspiration to others?

We've all heard that "necessity is the mother of invention", but I believe at least two other ingredients are crucial to the process – courage and passion. The courage to try something you have not done before, and the passion to turn it into reality! Did Erin know she would be able to successfully beat "corporate America"? Probably not, but she was willing to make the attempt, and she passionately believed in her cause – these two elements made all the difference!

Whether on a personal or a professional level, the process of reinventing yourself is all about reassessment, self-awareness, and a willingness to be a bit of an adventurer. From a business perspective, reinventing yourself as an entrepreneur is about branding - creating an image to shout out to the world exactly who you are, what your company is all about, and why clients should choose you over the competition. Most importantly, it is about who you have become. Remember Warren G. Bennis' warning, "People who cannot invent and reinvent themselves must be content with borrowed postures, secondhand ideas, fitting in instead of standing out."

My own reinvention journey began more than eight years ago, and for me it involved leaving behind a marriage I had outgrown, along with an entire life I had built, and embarking on a somewhat circuitous road to self-discovery and growth.

During the difficult time I took to put Humpty Dumpty back together, I also experienced some accomplishments – I shed some 60 unwanted pounds, spent an entire month traveling in Australia by myself (a dream I had had for years), and I began expanding my horizons. As I became accustomed to taking more calculated risks, I not only gained in confidence and strength, but I was able to also reach out and help others in their own journey. All of this eventually culminated in my mustering enough courage to open my own business. Little did I know that was just the beginning!

Sometimes, we start out in business because an opportunity comes our way at the right time, and we think we are ready for the challenge. So we just get on the bandwagon and go! My own development as an entrepreneur began quite by accident (although I know lots of great inventions and discoveries have had such ignoble beginnings), when I decided to become a contractor. Business notions such as branding, a cool company name, and a logo that would represent me were concepts as far removed from my reality as astrophysics and gene splicing. Not only that - I didn't even know what I didn't know!

Luckily, there are people in the world who have an understanding of these esoteric matters and are willing to share them with the less enlightened. I met many of these wonderful people who gave me the support I needed, both in business and on a personal level – they believed in me, provided real-life help, exhorted me to aim really high, and even became my clients! I could not have accomplished what I did without their help! They all told me the same thing – they wanted to be part of what I was doing because they saw how passionate and enthusiastic I was.



I will share with you that this process was another painfully meandering path. I started out relying solely on my past “paid” work experience - without truly examining my talents and gifts - with an incredibly lackluster name, no logo, and makeshift business cards! A few months later (that actually felt more like years), under the tutelage of my mentors and cheering squad, I had evolved into the Chief Creative Officer of Mind Ignition Associates, an “ideas company” specializing in offering innovative solutions to common entrepreneurial dilemmas in the realm of creative and business writing. I branded myself as an “ideas consultant”, built a web site, got some great new business cards which I never left home without, devoured business books and magazines, followed up each and every lead, and fairly quickly acquired some new clients. Although I have never had children, creating the logo alone made me feel like I had given birth!

Gaining clarity around my vision, I expanded my offering to include my belief that every entrepreneur has a “story to tell” and that it is from the process of discovering this story that great writing emerges. So, now I challenge my clients to dig deep within themselves to uncover what makes them (and by extension their businesses) unique and remarkable! Working closely in partnership we then create sales/marketing materials that are dynamic, exciting, and reflective of their particular talents and gifts as entrepreneurs. I have finally grown into my passion!

You will know when the time is right to reinvent yourself, your product, your service, your organizational structure, your company name, your web site, your logo, your tired old brand, or all of the above. You will know because what you have done up until now is so much less than you know you can do today! The urge to reach higher will be undeniable and you will have to go there.

If the timing is right, don't hesitate to restructure, reshape, and recreate to better reflect who you are today!

- Ileana Rontea, January 2003; Article has been featured in a number of online newsletters