



# How to Build Meaning, Impact, and Opportunity with Your Body of Work

Pamela Slim

# How do you make sense of your career in a work environment that no longer has any predictable career paths?

How do you create stability in a world that has no job security, uncertain markets, threats of terrorism, and a fiercely competitive global workforce? How do you balance making a living with making time for family, health, and recreation? How do you develop relationships with mentors when everyone is so busy? How do you keep your skills relevant in a world that moves so quickly that companies are launched, or destroyed, in a day? How do you plan for your financial future when you have no idea if your income stream will slow to a trickle, or even dry up completely if you get laid off or go through a difficult stage of business?

Standard career advice would say to get more education, work harder, and make yourself indispensable to your organization or customer base. This advice made a lot of sense in the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, this advice is incomplete.

I have spent the last twenty years coaching thousands of employees, executives, and entrepreneurs in a variety of industries. I have watched organizations start, grow, shrink, and implode.

I have sat across the table from longtime employees and watched them get laid off. I have helped start hundreds of new companies.

From these experiences I know the following to be true: No one is looking out for your career anymore. You must find meaning, locate opportunities, sell yourself, and plan for failure, calamity, and unexpected disasters. You must develop a set of skills that makes you able to earn an income in as many ways as possible.

The new world of work requires a new lens and skill set to ensure career success. You must create your own body of work as you operate in different organizational systems and structures.

*“No one is looking out for your career anymore. You must find meaning, locate opportunities, sell yourself, and plan for failure, calamity, and unexpected disasters. You must develop a set of skills that makes you able to earn an income in as many ways as possible.”*

When you view your career through the lens of an overarching body of work, you:

- know the deeper roots that connect your entire work and life experience.
- count all significant experiences and skills in your life as “ingredients” that can be put together into interesting new “work recipes.”
- are not afraid of pursuing work inside and outside of companies.
- base career decisions on your ability to foster skill development and meaningful creative output, as well as financial stability.
- choose to work for organizations that share your values and interests.
- contribute significant, useful, and beautiful things to the world.
- are aware of the risks and pitfalls in the creative process and have the tools and resources to deal with them.
- have mental clarity, intellectual rigor, and self-awareness.
- have an active, motivated, and engaged group of peers and mentors.
- live by a very personal definition of success.

# What Exactly Is a Body Of Work?

As Daniel Pink wrote in *Drive*, “The secret to high performance and satisfaction—at work, at school, and at home—is the deeply human need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world.”

Your body of work is everything you create, contribute, affect, and impact. For individuals, it is the personal legacy you leave at the end of your life, including all the tangible and intangible things you have created. Individuals who structure their careers around autonomy, mastery, and purpose will have a powerful body of work.

For organizations, it is the products, property, inventions, ideas, and value they share throughout the course of their existence. Organizations that structure their internal strategies around autonomy, mastery, and purpose will be more competitive and resilient.

Smiling and waving at your neighbor every morning as you get the paper can contribute to your bigger desire to see more civility and joy in the world.

Your jaunt in a legal career may be a very important part of your body of work contributing to the well-being of busy professionals through your yoga-based health and wellness practice.

My passion for and commitment to individual determination and transformation has led me from community development projects on the outskirts of Bogotá, Colombia, to science and art education to teaching martial arts to corporate consulting to parenting to blogging to entrepreneur coaching and writing books. And it will take me in new directions in the future, without having to feel constrained by any one audience or business or job title.

*“Your body of work is everything you create, contribute, affect, and impact. ... It is the personal legacy you leave at the end of your life.”*

A body of work is big and deep and complex. It allows you to experiment and play and change and test. It supports creative freedom.

It includes obvious things, like books, software code, photographs, videos, process improvements, paintings, and stories.

And not so obvious things, like community development, love, movements, memories, and relationships.

Bodies of work often have big overarching themes such as:

- Solving complex problems—like David Batstone’s commitment to end human trafficking with his nonprofit advocacy organization, Not For Sale.
- Building bridges—like Kai Dupé and his work to bridge the digital divide in technology for people of color.
- Changing the world through powerful communication—like Nancy Duarte, who has changed the way business leaders create and deliver presentations.
- Making the world more accessible to more people—like Glenda Watson Hyatt, the Canadian writer and motivational speaker with cerebral palsy who writes with her left thumb.
- Strengthening the bond between parents and children—like Marilyn Scott-Waters, a children’s book author who has created a world of free paper toys at [thetoymaker.com](http://thetoymaker.com).

Each of these examples shows a deep commitment to a cause or problem that is bigger than any one job title or profession or business. And they can include a whole range of output, including writing, physical products, legal legislation, systems, speeches, books, conversations, and advocacy.

Focusing on building a body of work will give you more freedom and clarity to choose different work options throughout the course of your life, and you'll be able to connect your diverse accomplishments, sell your story, and continually reinvent and relaunch your brand.

Imagine yourself on the last day of your life, looking back at your body of work. What do you want to see?

So where do you start?

## What Are Your Roots?

The foundation for your body of work lives in your roots. Your roots are the purpose, beliefs, and convictions that provide the foundation for your body of work. They keep you strong and stable when you face challenges in your career and remind you why it is important to keep moving through adversity. They also provide depth and meaning to your creative process and remind you why it is important to chase the things you want to create.

Many people think their roots are in building a fortune. "I work for money. Money gives me the things that make me happy."



In my experience coaching all kinds of people over twenty years, I will tell you that money is not enough of a driver to make it through the truly challenging times. You will eventually face difficulties in every job or business that lead you to question if you have the strength to stick with your chosen career path.

When these moments appear, I like to ask the following questions:

- Why are you doing this (business) (parenting) (difficult project) (job)?
- What will happen if you succeed?
- Will it be worth it even if you fail?
- Why does it matter?
- What will you regret not doing?
- What will you rejoice leaving as a legacy at the end of your life?

*“Imagine yourself on the last day of your life, looking back at your body of work. What do you want to see?”*

No matter your current job or position, each person will have different answers to these questions depending on their specific roots: who they are, what they value, and what drives them.

Your roots steady you in the inevitable storm of creation.

You discover your roots by reflecting on six primary questions:

### **1. What do you value?**

Your values describe what is most important to you. They help guide you to make decisions and set boundaries around what you will accept in your life and career.

When you know your values, you can answer questions like:

- Should I take this job?
- Is this the right person to marry?
- Should I try this marketing approach in my business?
- Should I partner with this person?

When you make decisions in harmony with your values, you feel grounded and at ease.

When you make decisions in conflict with your values, you feel uneasy and ineffective.

Values can also be called character strengths.

Example: You value critical thinking (thinking things through), honesty (authenticity, integrity), kindness (generosity, compassion), prudence (being careful about choices), and fairness (treating all people the same). You work for a financial institution that you know is engaged in unethical lending practices that prey on vulnerable communities. In this situation, no matter how much you try to make your job work, because the environment is in direct conflict with your values, you would be better served to look for an organization that is more aligned with your values.

## **2. What do you believe?**

Your beliefs are unique to you and form the foundation for how you interpret and act in the world. They are shaped by your childhood, your life experiences, your education, advice you have received from teachers and mentors, and your philosophical or spiritual orientation. A simple way to understand what you believe is to answer the question “What do you know to be true?”

Example: One of your beliefs is that everyone, regardless of his or her background, has the capability to do great things.

### **3. Why do you believe it?**

Which experiences have shaped your values and your beliefs? What has made you secure and certain in your values and beliefs?

Example: You believe that everyone, regardless of background, has the capability to do great things. You believe this because you watched your father, who came to this country as an immigrant in his early twenties, build a successful business with next to no money, even though he was not fluent in English.

### **4. Whom do you care deeply about serving?**

Of all the people who you could impact during your time on earth, whom do you want to work with? Which type of person “gets” you and really needs what you have to offer?

Example: You are a training and development manager with a humanities background, but you love to work with highly technical people. You appreciate their intelligence, curiosity, and critical perspective. You notice that when you teach them, you are pushed to deliver the highest quality, tested training classes. When you are able to earn their trust, you make a huge difference in their lives because they take what you teach and apply it methodically in their lives.

## **5. Which problems do you want to solve?**

Which challenges get you really fired up? What impact do you want to have in the world? What specific knowledge do you have that you think can make a difference in the world?

Example: You are passionate about childhood nutrition. You notice that parents, especially moms, are so busy that they don't have time to plan and cook healthy meals. So you really want to help solve the childhood nutrition problem by discovering ways to support busy moms.

## **6. What drives you to act?**

Most of us have long to-do lists. Very few of us can check off every item at the end of the day. What motivated you to accomplish great things in the past? What motivated you to finish? Pay special attention to thoughts, conditions, or techniques that cause you to take action.

Example: You always wanted to run a marathon but constantly found excuses for not going through with it. Then your mother got breast cancer, and you suddenly felt inspired to run in a fund-raising marathon on her behalf. From this experience, you learn that you are inspired to take action when you see a direct benefit for someone you care about.

Don't sweat it if you can't answer all six of these questions yet. Simply plant the questions in your head and pay attention to the answers as they come to you.

# Your Ingredients

We often describe ourselves primarily by the title of our profession or the name of our degree.

“This is Mike. He is an operations manager.”

“This is Farah. She has a PhD from Harvard.”

“This is Lee. She is a stay-at-home mom.”

These descriptions communicate one aspect of our lives at a particular point in time. But there are infinite other parts to each of us that add competence, distinction, emotional depth, strength, and meaning to the way we live each and every day.

I call these other parts our ingredients.

Our ingredients are the skills, strengths, experiences, identity, and knowledge that we have gained throughout the course of our lives.

They are what make us uniquely capable and interesting.

We are not bullets on a resume looking for a job, we are cupboards of ingredients, looking for a recipe.

While Mike Bruny's business card might state that he is an operations manager for Intel, you may not know that he is also:

- A writer
- An encyclopedia of hip-hop lyrics
- Obsessed with bow ties
- A public speaker
- A brand ambassador
- Emotionally intelligent
- A student of lean startup principles
- African-American
- A sports marketing expert
- A certified life coach
- The son of a mechanic and a housewife/babysitter/seamstress

All of these ingredients make Mike a unique individual. Mike uses his ingredients in many distinct ways to develop a rich and interesting body of work. He founded a bow tie line. He teaches people the art of conference networking in online classes. He acts as a conference ambassador at business events. He represents his company at events celebrating black men and women who work in the technology sector.

*“ We are not bullets on a resume looking for a job,  
we are cupboards of ingredients, looking for a recipe.*

**You must go beyond your job description.** We highlight small elements of our skill set and experiences in order to fit in to a particular job description or business niche.

The reality is that in order to create your body of work you must rely on all of your ingredients, even those that you might not consider relevant to your professional career.



**How do you determine your ingredients?** Your ingredients can be grouped into six main categories.

1. **Roles** | Which job roles have you fulfilled? (Examples: salesperson, parent, martial artist.)
2. **Skills** | Which measurable skills do you have? (Examples: Ruby on Rails programming, Spanish, customer service, accounting.) Where did you learn them?
3. **Strengths** | Which strengths come naturally to you? (Examples: writing, selling, baking.)
4. **Experience** | What kinds of work situations (academic, corporate, nonprofit, entrepreneurial) have you been in? What kinds of life experiences have you had? (Examples: study abroad, travel, wealthy parents, abusive relationships, health challenges.)
5. **Values** | What do you believe in? (Examples: mastery, justice, Second Amendment rights) Why?
6. **Scars** | Which life situations have brought you to your knees? What did you learn from those situations?

You are going to use different ingredients at different times of your career.

# Work Modes In the New World Of Work

The last twenty years have brought massive revolution to the way we work. Where telecommuting was a novelty a decade ago, now entire industries have sprung up around Internet business models that have customers, suppliers, and producers distributed all over the world.

In a study conducted by software company Intuit in 2010 and cited by NextSpace CEO Jeremy Neuner, it is predicted that by 2020, more than 40 percent of the US workforce will be so-called contingent workers. That is more than 60 million people.

In a twenty-first-century economy, people move between many organizations, jobs, and business environments. Change, flux, and continual upheaval are the new normal.

But most people are not aware of the many ways they can apply their various talents to different work modes in order to earn a living while creating a meaningful body of work.

A laid-off corporate employee may have highly valuable skills that he can use to work on freelance projects while he looks for a new full-time position. A worn-out small-business owner may not realize that her skills could be extremely valuable within a larger organization, where she could put them to use without continually hustling for new customers, and feel the relief of a regular paycheck.

Working for yourself is not always liberating. Creating things that matter, in the work mode that supports you best is freedom.

This list of work modes will continue to grow and evolve with innovations and changes in the economy:

- **Employee** | You work for someone else for a wage and benefits.
- **Contractor** | You work for yourself, or for an agency, often for a primary employer or project.
- **Freelancer** | You work for yourself, doing a variety of projects for a variety of clients.
- **Small- Business Owner** | You own a specific online or brick-and-mortar business, where you develop and sell products and services to a specific market.
- **Startup Founder with Funding** | You develop a specific product with great market potential and go after angel or venture capital funding.
- **Social Entrepreneur** | You own a business that has an explicit social agenda, often using the profits, or a portion of profits, generated by the enterprise to fund projects that support social good.

- **Independent Producer** | You are an artist (including fine arts, photography, music, writing, and more), and you raise funds through a combined source of crowdsourcing (like Kickstarter or Indiegogo), or by selling your wares on sites like Bance or Etsy. You may also be lucky enough to have a patron, or a corporate sponsor.
- **Nonprofit Professional** | You are a freelancer or an employee of a nonprofit organization.

*“Working for yourself is not always liberating. Creating things that matter, in the work mode that supports you best is freedom.”*

- **Unofficial Confederation Member** | In the new world of work, many independent professionals, such as coaches, Web developers, programmers, writers, and graphic designers, gather together to work on projects, in addition to work they do independently. Often there is no official business or organization structure, just deep trust and confidence in each other’s abilities, and sales capability within the confederation to pitch big projects.

- **Internet Personality** | The rise of advertising on YouTube has opened the door for individuals with compelling (depending on who you ask) personalities. The New York Times estimates that Jenna Marbles, who they called “The Woman With 1 Billion Clicks” could have earned as much as \$346,827.12 in 2012.
- **Multipotentialites** | As a coach for many hundreds of clients, I noticed that there was a certain kind of person who not only had a huge amount of unique “ingredients” but who also felt extremely boxed in whenever we would talk about choosing a particular kind of career or business or work mode. Thanks to Emilie Wapnick, I now know that these folks are called multipotentialites. Emilie coined the term to refer to a person who has many interests and talents and often works in a mixture of the work modes previously described.

You can and most likely will work in a mixture of different work modes throughout the course of your life.

The only relevant question you need to ask is:

**At this point in my life, which work mode will support my creative process, and deliver the quality of life that I desire right now?**

There are no magic work modes. Being an entrepreneur, or CEO of a large company, or a tenured professor is not what is going to deliver your happiness. What you create while in this mode, will.

# The Skill of Creating

In the new world of work, our ability to create a powerful body of work is what will determine our ongoing employability. In order to create, you have to quickly scope, design, and ship a series of creative projects that come in many forms.

- If you step into a new job, you have a short time to make a mark and prove to your employer that he or she made a great choice hiring you.
- If you start a business, you have a limited amount of time to get a product to market and attract your first customers.
- If you run a nonprofit, you need to organize a program or a project to serve your community and galvanize funding.
- If you merge two companies, you have to evaluate staffing, manage customers, work on branding, integrate the cultures, and create a unified business plan.

Your creative work will tell your story. And in order to tell a story, you have to get it out of your head and into the world.

As Scott Branson, the author of Making Ideas Happen and founder of Branson and 99U, says about the future of work:

“We will ultimately live in a perpetual data-driven talent edition. Every thing you create will be measured and tracked by others through comments, shares, and likes. Your work will come up on the radar of potential employers and clients, and the data will tell them if you are worth talking to or hiring.”

Your words do not communicate your value, your work does.

*“Your words do not communicate your value,  
your work does.”*

In order to develop mastery around creating, you must ask yourself these 5 questions of every project:

1. **What do you want to create?** Name it. Describe it. (A book, a job, a video, an app)
2. **Who is it for?** Describe your audience. (Include specific details about who you are targeting.)
3. **Why does it need to be accomplished?** Describe the roots of the project. (How does this fit into your body of work? Who will be affected by it? What positive outcomes will occur as the result of you completing it?)
4. **How are you going to structure the project?** Define a model. (Who has done something similar in the past? How was it structured? How can you customize this model and make it your own?)
5. **When does it need to be finished?** Make a timeline. Set a deadline. (Nothing happens without a deadline. Set a date and work backward.)

Soon enough, asking these questions will become second nature. You will think about each one for each new piece of your body of work. Creating rapidly will quickly become an unconscious skill.



# Fear Is Inevitable

One of the most wonderful and terrifying, things about life is that we have no idea how it is going to turn out.

We get sick or injured. People we love die. The economy crashes. Spouses leave. A business partner runs away with our money. We take a big risk to be creative in our presentation and fail miserably, in public.

Because the new world of work is unstable and unpredictable, uncertainty, fear, and doubt are inevitable parts of building your body of work.

Managing fear and uncertainty is core to thriving and surviving in this environment.

While it is normal for people to get depressed or afraid about the unknown, the key is to keep moving forward by focusing on the future. If you focus on what you want in your life instead of what you don't want, you'll see your opportunities expand.

Paralyzed with fear? Learn to flip on your winner switch.

In order to develop resilience in the face of fear and uncertainty, you need four skills.

## **Skill 1 | View adversity as a means of growth**

No matter the severity of the challenge you are facing, ask yourself these questions:

This experience is:

- preparing me to do great work.
- preparing me to be a smarter, kinder, or more compassionate person.
- teaching me exactly what I need to know so I can create better, more effective work.
- reminding me of what my true, natural strengths are and aren't.
- pushing me to make an urgent decision about something that is critical to my well-being.
- teaching me what I need to get help with, outsource, or stop doing.
- teaching me to have more patience.
- fulfilling my destiny.

*“ Paralyzed with fear? Learn to flip on your winner switch.*

## **Skill 2 | Diagnose your fear**

Your fear shares critical information with you multiple times a day. We are often encouraged to “crush the fear,” “ignore the fear,” or “stomp on fear.” I prefer to surf the fear. The protective instinct of your lizard brain can help you develop tremendous awareness and a healthy, motivated attitude toward your success. When you are gripped by fear, you need to slow down and process the emotion in the rational part of your brain. Try to talk through your fears with a compassionate person. If that’s not possible, write down the answers to these questions:

- What are you afraid of?
- Why are you afraid of it?
- What do you need to know to reduce the fear?
- If you were to practice this thing that you are afraid of doing, would it get better?
- Is this thing you are afraid of something that is negative or unhealthy for you, or a positive opportunity for growth?
- If this is a positive opportunity for growth, who do you know who might be able to help you overcome your fear?

### **Step 3 | Process the unexpected**

While in the midst of a huge, painful challenge, it is impossible to imagine a new future. You want to slug anyone who suggests that “everything happens for a reason.” Yet over and over again, I have seen people rise from huge heartbreak and build a new life. My client Sarah has been working on an amazing fair-trade project with Rwandan artisans called Songa Designs. If you know anything about Rwandan history in the 1990s, you know that it is filled with unimaginable terror and genocide. Yet tremendous beauty exists in the art and economy being built by Rwandan people today. We can learn from those who have witnessed the worst of humanity and still choose to build the best for humanity.

### **Step 4 | Overcome distress and procrastination**

If there is one thing I know for sure from the twenty plus years I have been coaching both martial arts and business, it is that with the right motivation and drive, people can make astounding, unexpected, nearly miraculous change. So if you have been stuck in an unfulfilling career for years, if you have wanted to write a book but never get to it, if you want to stop smoking, get in shape, or repair your fractured relationship with your ex-husband so that you can both be better parents, please know that it is possible to change. You just have to develop ways to quickly shift your mind-set when you get stuck.

# Collaboration and Innovation

In order to build a deep and powerful body of work, we must surround our selves with peers, mentors and advocates who will push us to do our very best work.

This requires network building, a key 21st century work skill.

## **Who should you have in your networks?**

I recommend that everyone have the following people in their network (in addition to your beloved spouse and kids/pets):

- Two people you can text at any time day or night
- Two mentors you can call when you have great challenges or opportunities
- A smart, challenging friend who will pick apart your ideas without crushing your confidence
- A best friend you can whine to, or celebrate with
- A strong, clear-thinking analytical friend who can help you solve complex problems
- A pocketful of creative thinkers who don't mind being pinged on the phone or Skype

Of course you can have a lot more people in your circle, but if you have these bases covered, you are in excellent shape.

We all need each other.

### **What can real, live people do that books, videos, or your own brain cannot?**

**Hold you accountable** | My friend Michael Bungay Stanier, author of *Do More Great Work*, took a keen interest in my own crazy writing process and volunteered to be my accountability partner for writing my book. Our methods included daily e-mail check-ins about the number of words written, as well as scattered Skype chats when I get stuck or overwhelmed. Knowing that Michael is investing his time in my success makes me feel extra motivated to get the book done.

**Challenge your thinking** | You want people in your life who will help you to think in new, different, and more nuanced ways. My friend Barbara Saunders always has a unique perspective on my work and takes the time to offer detailed comments. (Incidentally, our podcast interview about how we misjudge introverts is one of my most popular.)

**Balance your strengths** | Chances are, if you have tremendous strengths in one area (strategic thinking, graphic design, quantum physics), you also have noteworthy weaknesses in other areas.

Highly detailed tax attorney Kyle Durand has done the unthinkable: made this liberal arts major get excited about legal contracts, partnership agreements, and watertight financial statements.

**Remind you of your true path** | Best friends like my Desiree Adaway remind you that no matter how dark the current moment appears, there is a better day ahead. People who know you very well have a unique perspective about your patterns and your true self.

**Motivate you** | Andy Pels refuses to let me do anything less than my best work. He immediately sends me an email if I have a typo in a blog post. He actually prescheduled motivating e-mails last August to hit my in-box at the time when I was due to be finishing my book.

I have many more dear friends and trusted colleagues, but these are a few examples of the kind of people who can keep you moving forward, despite your valiant efforts to shrink back from your greatness.

“ *We all need each other.* ”

# Success in the new world of work

You may be proud of the work you create. But will you feel successful?

How do you define true success?

This question has plagued academics, artists, parents, teachers, and businesspeople for centuries. It has spawned hundreds of motivational posters and thousands of quotes. I have rarely met a person in my life who does not want to feel successful.

Personally, I define success as enjoying my life while I am living it. Which means living in accordance with my values, doing work that matters, being available to my loved ones, and staying focused and mindful in the present, instead of wishing for success in the future.

But success is different for everyone. What does success mean to you? How do we know if we have reached the pinnacle of success? And how do you shape a body of work that leads to a successful outcome?

*“ Making yourself miserable trying to emulate someone else?  
You have success dysmorphia. Embrace your own success.*



Making yourself miserable trying to emulate someone else? You have success dysmorphia. Embrace your own success.

**Body of Work Success Framework** | Your Body of Work Success Framework draws from everything we have talked about so far.

**Your Roots** | What is deeply important to you, inherently interesting, and intrinsically motivating? Who do you want to impact and why?

**Your Ingredients** | Which projects utilize a compelling mix of your ingredients, leverage your strengths, and continually allow you to learn, grow, and develop?

**Your Handling of Fear and Doubt** | How will you handle inevitable challenges that come your way? How will you learn from your mistakes and become more flexible and resilient? How will you develop grit to get through the tough times?

**Your Work Mode** | Are you working as an employee, self-funded activist, academic, freelancer, or entrepreneur or multipotentialite? Which standards of success do you want to measure? (Job performance rating, impact on your audience, number of projects completed, annual sales, or enthusiasm for rate of personal and professional growth)

**Your Creation** | What are you creating now (a product, a degree, a book, an album, a movement)? What does completion look like? What standard are you using to measure the quality of the creation? (Number of units sold, grade point average, awards, number of comments or followers)

**Your Quality of Life** | How much money do you need to cover your financial needs? Are you a minimalist who is happy with few material objects? Or are you a maximist who is only happy with lots of material objects? How much additional money do you want to invest in your own pleasure pursuits, the growth of your business, or the service of others? How much money do you want to have in reserve for uncertain financial times, job loss, business, or retirement?

**Your Relationships and Collaborations** | What kind of friend, spouse, parent, and community member do you want to be? Who do you need to have around you to ensure that you do your best thinking and complete projects that are important to you? How much time do you want to invest in your relationships? How many relationships can you sustain and still have time to rest, recover and create?

**Your Emotional and Physical Well-Being** | How do you want to feel when you wake up in the morning? Where do you derive true emotional well-being and satisfaction? Which conditions will drive optimal physical and emotional health?

After you've completed this exercise, you may find that your expectations in each of the categories are in direct conflict with each other.

That's perfectly normal. If certain areas compete, which is a priority right now? Which sacrifices are you willing to make to serve your priorities?

## Tying Your Story Together

Now that we've done the heavy lifting of digging into your roots, ingredients, and work mode; discussed difficult topics like creativity and fear; and defined how you will measure your success, it's time to enter the last step: How do you tie it all together to create a compelling story and a marketable package?

No matter how wonderful and fulfilling your body of work is, if you want people to believe in it, act on it, be moved by it, or buy it, you must shape it into a cohesive narrative and tell powerful stories.

**The Two Critical Stories for Career Success** | I spoke with a client who was entering the job market after spending an extended period of time doing a mix of freelance work and raising children.

He was concerned about holes in his experience and the impact they would have on securing a good job.

He felt scared, uncomfortable, and insecure.

Another client had gone through a really tough period in her life, which had caused her to drop some balls at work. Coworkers weren't happy, and she was concerned about how it would impact her opportunities moving forward.

She felt awkward, ashamed, and stuck.

In both these cases, there are two very important stories to tell.

The quality of your life is directly related to the quality of your stories. Especially those you tell yourself.

*“The quality of your life is directly related to the quality of your stories. Especially those you tell yourself.”*

**The Story You Tell Yourself** | Going after new goals is challenging. The job market is competitive. It isn't easy to create art, or to get customers, or to write a book. It is hard to bounce back from failure or adversity. Before you start to worry about what someone else thinks about you, you have to make sure that you are thinking great things about yourself.

Consider the difference between these two stories.

“I have been out of the job market for five years and have not kept up on all the latest trends in technology. I am scared that prospective employers might see me as lacking. I must do whatever it takes to prove that I am worthy. I am desperate for a job. I will take any opportunity that comes my way and heave a sigh of relief, because it will mean that they accept me, despite my flaws.”

How are you feeling after reading something like this? Kind of yucky and in need of a hug, right?

Consider this alternative.

“I am proud of the wide variety of experiences that I have had in my life. I can think of many times when I was put into new and challenging situations and learned quickly. Being out of the job market for a while has given me a new and refreshing perspective that makes me extremely focused and excited for new opportunities. I have enjoyed working for myself, but now I am ready to be back in a team environment where I have support and resources to get my work done.

I want to work in a place that appreciates my experience. I will do a great job, and they will be lucky to have me.”

That feels better, doesn't it? The first story reminds me of *Das Boot* (a film some find a classic, but what I find a most depressing German film about men stuck in a submarine) and the second story reminds me of *Rocky III*. (No one brings out “Eye of the Tiger” like Apollo Creed.)

When crafting your personal story, consider:

- What skills and strengths and ingredients am I really proud of?
- What are the threads and themes of my life experience?
- What big gifts have I received from challenges I have faced?
- What is my hero's journey?
- What is the soundtrack of my life? Is it one of the most depressing country songs of all time or an uplifting anthem?

**The Story You Tell Others** | Once you get a clear and empowering story to tell yourself, you need to work on the story that will resonate and influence others.

In addition to the questions you have answered for your own story, add these:

- What challenges are these (potential employers, prospective clients, resistant team members, crowdfunding prospects) facing?
- How might my background and experience help them to overcome their challenges?
- How can I clearly and powerfully respond to legitimate concerns about holes, gaps, or weaknesses in my background or skills?
- How does my total life experience give me a unique competitive advantage over fellow job applicants or business owners?
- How can I prepare to give the best interview or sales call of my life?
- How can I deliver tremendous, measurable value to the people I want to work with?

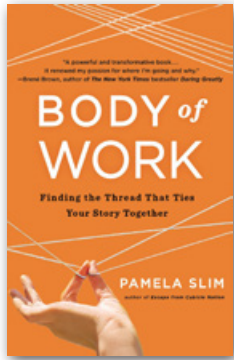
Every day, I see people with similar backgrounds and equivalent skills accomplish radically different results.

One big reason for this is the story they tell themselves and others on a daily basis.

**The quality of your life is directly related to the quality of your stories.**

**You must craft them well. 📖**

# Info



**BUY THE BOOK** | Get more details or buy a copy of [Body of Work](#).

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** | Pamela Slim is an award-winning author, business coach and speaker. She spent the first 10 years of her business as a consultant to large companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Charles Schwab, and Cisco Systems, where she worked with thousands of executives, managers and employees. In 2005, she started the Escape from Cubicle Nation blog, which is now one of the top career and business blogs on the web. In the last 8 years, she helped hundreds of entrepreneurs to start successful businesses. Pam's first book *Escape from Cubicle Nation: From Corporate Prisoner to Thriving Entrepreneur* was released in Spring, 2009 and won Best Small Business/Entrepreneur Book of 2009 by 800-CEO-READ.

→ **SEND THIS** | [Pass along a copy](#) of this manifesto to others.

→ **SUBSCRIBE** | [Sign up for e-news](#) to learn when our latest manifestos are available.

This document was created on January 29, 2014 and is based on the best information available at that time. The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit [Creative Commons](#) or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA. Cover image from [Veer](#). You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.



# About ChangeThis

[ChangeThis](#) is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

## *800ceoread*

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at [800-CEO-READ](#) or at our daily [blog](#).



Explore your knowledge further with [KnowledgeBlocks](#), a new project from 800-CEO-READ that lets you turn what you know into knowledge you can use.